

Simeon (Luke 2:25-32))

On seeing the baby Jesus, Simeon says he is ready to face his own death. Why is this? This is the talk from the St. Luke's 2021 Service of Remembrance just before Christmas.

One person dies another life is born

One thing that sometimes brings comfort when someone dies, is the fact that it coincides with the birth of a new member of the family.

I remember years ago a lovely member of St. Luke's was dying of cancer in the hospice. Just at that time her granddaughter gave birth, so that the lady was able to meet her great-grandchild before she died. For the family this gift of new life seemed in some way to bring comfort a kind of compensation of a new life to love as an old one passed away.

In my own family, my grandfather was one of 13 children - I think he was the 12th and he was very close to his brother who was the 13th. Yet, tragically, when they were still young men, his brother, days after he was married, went off on a naval ship at the height of the war. The ship was sunk and he drowned.

My dad was born soon after and so, my granddad decided to name him after his brother, my dad's uncle: Reginald. Somehow, I guess the appearing of new life helped bring comfort in the face of death.

New birth, I guess gives hope. There is a future for this new child to grow up into. Life goes on. The death of a loved one, no matter how much it can seem to bring grief and darkness, does not bring an end to life in totality.

At the heart of the Christmas story is of course the birth of a baby. Yet, the point of what the Bible wants to show us about the nativity stories, is that this baby is special.

In fact this baby somehow offers comfort to people as they contemplate death, as we see in the passage we just read, the one about Simeon.

Simeon - a good man

In our passage which tells us of some events which happened when Jesus was a new baby, being taken to the temple to be presented to the Lord, we hear from a man called Simeon.

Simeon was someone worth listening to. He was probably old and wise, because he is thinking about his own death, but the Bible emphasises that he is someone who we should listen to.

He was righteous, which meant that he wanted to do the right thing, to tell the truth, to help not confuse people.

He was devout. That meant he took his religion seriously. He would have been a man of prayer, constantly reading and listening to the Scriptures. Keen to follow God and do and say what he wanted.

We are also told the Holy Spirit was on him. God was enabling him to speak words from God to say and know what was right.

All of this shows us that Simeon was someone worth listening to.

Simeon - an expectant man

But, Simeon was also an expectant man. He was waiting for God to act.

It says that God had told him that he would not die before he saw the Messiah with his own eyes. It also says he was waiting for the consolation or comfort of Israel.

These were great promises, linked with the hope in the scriptures that God would act to bring salvation. He would do something amazing for his people to help them out of the darkness and sadness that we experience in our present world.

Simeon trusted that God would act, that God would keep his promises.

Then this young couple, Mary and Joseph, bring the little baby into the temple and when Simeon sees him he says,

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace...'

Simeon says that this baby is the fulfilment of God's promises, the personal one to him and the one for all of Israel. He even goes on to say that this baby is a light for the whole world.

This baby is special. This baby is salvation!

But, why does Simeon find peace from this baby. Why is he happy to die now he has seen this baby? How does the message at the heart of Christmas help us as we face death?

The baby that is salvation

If this world is all there is, if there is no God, no heaven or hell as John Lennon sang, then there is no answer to our greatest problem of death. No ultimate hope. All we can do is make the most of our life now and hope the children we leave the world to remember us.

Even if there is a God, but he doesn't care about us, then again there is no hope. And why should God who created such a vast, amazing and awesome universe care about these strange animals on this tiny rock orbiting an insignificant star that is one of trillions of other stars.

At the heart of Christmas, though, is a claim that this God does care about human beings. He cares so much that he became one of us. That is the amazing truth contained in that tiny baby.

Yet, he didn't just become one of us, he went on to die for us, to give his life. To break the power of our sin and rebellion against God and the death that results. He came to create a way back to God, to reconcile us to God, to create peace between us and God. He came to give us light in our darkness, hope in a world of despair, life even though we die.

Somehow, Simeon grasped some of that in that tiny baby and in doing so was able to face his own death with peace. God cares, God is with us, God has come to save us.

Will you this Christmas grasp this great truth that is at the heart of Christmas and choose to follow Jesus as the way to eternal life. Will you do that so that you can find the same comfort and peace even now?