

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

**²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.
³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel."**

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

"It's a Christmas Miracle!" Spoken in the movies when some wake up to snow falling on Christmas morning, or when one self-sufficient 8 year-old cleans up a messy house before his parents return from leaving him Home Alone- it's a phrase that you will hear used often and likely incorrectly this time of year. There was an armored vehicle in Hong Kong that spilled 4 million dollars on to a highway a few days ago – some dubbed it a Christmas miracle. There was a dog named Tater the terrier who survived a venomous snake bite this week – guess what that was? You are right, a Christmas miracle! There was a nice young man in New York who paid his parents' mortgage for them. Super generous, yes! Christmas miracle! Not really!

But today we read about a Christmas miracle. Come with me to the temple in Jerusalem and witness **A** (real) **Christmas Miracle** take place!

Mary and Joseph brought their new son to the temple to fulfill two rites that God's law required. The first was called "the Presentation." When a mother's first son was born, she was required to bring him to the temple to present him to the Lord for a life of service. Ever since the last plague in Egypt where the firstborn sons of the Egyptians died, God had told the Israelites that the firstborn sons belonged to him. They would be his for lives of service, unless they were presented and bought back from the Lord. The Firstborn sons were redeemed for 5 shekels, about 3 weeks wages. Consider the significance of that event. The world's Redeemer being redeemed. The one who was given as a gift from God, was bought back from God for a couple hundred bucks. How that paled in comparison to the Redemption price that he would offer one day!!

Also on the agenda for their day at the temple was Mary's purification. After childbirth, a women was unclean for 40 days. After that she would present her sacrifice to be purified, made clean again.

Mary's plan was to knock out both of these requirements in one trip to the big city. God's plan was for something even greater to happen that day! He had in mind to fulfill some promises and announce his grace in a special way.

Luke 2:25-32

There was a man named Joshua Bell. He was a world-renowned, Grammy award winning violinist. He was chosen by a local magazine to conduct an experiment. They sent him out with his Stradivarius violin worth over \$3 million and his t-shirt and baseball cap in the Washington DC Metro subway station. They had him playing Mozart and Vivaldi pieces, some of the most beautiful music ever written played by one of the most talented violinists that has ever lived. What would happen? Here's what the Washington Post said about the experiment, they called it "an experiment in context, perception, and priorities - as well as an unblinking assessment of public taste." They asked, "In a banal setting, at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?" Would people recognize greatness clothed in lowliness standing mere feet before them in the living flesh? Would they? ...

The answer was largely, "No!" Over one thousand people walked past, mistaking him for a dime-a-dozen unemployed performer. They were in the presence of greatness. They were being given a concert that would have cost people hundreds of dollars and the only thing that was missing was a tuxedo and some padded chairs. But they judged the surface. They looked at the outward appearance and missed the show!

It occurred to me that this is what was happening that day in the Temple. There were a whole lot of people who walked right past the God of the universe! He didn't look the way the expected, he didn't appear the way that most would have guessed and that caused many to miss to miss the show. Think about it. In a crowded temple, there would have been people that likely bumped into Jesus without knowing it. The young couple Mary and Joseph had no red carpet to walk in on or dazzling light show. They used the front gate like everyone else and went almost entirely unnoticed. Even the priests that performed the presentation and purification rites had no clue. They would have held Jesus in their arms and given him back totally clueless to the greatness that they had held in their arms!

Isn't that the way that the world treats Jesus? They push him out of his own birthday celebration. They walk right past him and for many don't even notice that he is there. He created the world, but science write him out of the story. He came to save the world, but people invent their own religions and their own ideas about how to get to heaven. The world rushes swiftly by and doesn't even stop to consider Jesus.

But it's more than just the world that goes through life without recognizing Jesus, we are guilty too. What about the times that we allow life to go barreling by without giving God a second thought. We come up with any and every excuse to set aside an everyday worship, Bible Study prayer life. We are so busy, there are important things to do instead of beholding the baby. Don't we rush right past baby Jesus with our attention foolishly on other things? When life gets difficult, instead of contemplating and clinging to the sure promises of God, we use those hardships as a reason to doubt. We set Jesus, our life's only hope and salvation, down and we run to pick up self-reliance, we find other ways to cope with life and we ignore the promises of God. When there are other people around, we don't always stand up for God's truths, too often we set Jesus down to chase after acceptance, harmony, what we think is called peace.

For the times that we walk past our God, for the times that we ignore him or walk away from him, we deserve to have him walk away from us. We deserve him to keep moving and to extend his love to someone who will pay him more attention. We deserve to be skipped over on God's love, on his protection and on his forgiveness. We deserve hell for the many times we walk past Jesus and for our many and varied sins beyond that.

But that is not at all what we receive. In his mercy and grace, we still receive the forgiveness that Jesus was born to deliver. Instead of walking past us, God comes to us in Jesus. In an act of sheer undeserved love, God places Jesus into our arms and into our hearts through faith. God blesses us with the vision of Simeon to be able to believe the things that he confessed when he held the baby in his arms.

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

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you now dismiss your servant in peace.
³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”***

We are the Gentiles who have had the light of revelation shone on us. We have been given amazing vision – through God’s Word – to be able to say with Simeon ***For my eyes have seen your salvation***, we see and believe not just this story, but the rest of the story of the life of Jesus as well. We see Jesus perfectly fulfilling God’s law in our place. We see Jesus showing love and selflessness to all he encountered. We see him going out of his way to meet the outcast and the sinners. We see Jesus silently enduring unfair treatment, willingly accepting our guilty verdict and humbly offering his life on the cruel cross. We see Jesus breathe his last, while speaking and showing love, right to the end. We see them place him in the tomb, and we see that tomb empty just 3 days later. We see the risen Christ appearing to the disciples and displaying his victory. We see him ascending into heaven and the same faith that allows us to see causes us to believe that he is in heaven today, preparing our mansions for the eternity of grace he’s promised us with him. Truly we can say with Simeon – ***my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people***.

You know the old Christmas trick, to put a small gift in a huge package. You might even throw some rocks in there to make it heavier than it really is. That way the person you are giving the gift to will have no clue what is really inside.

It’s easy to put a little gift in big package, it’s far more difficult to put a big gift in a little package. But that is exactly what God has done in Jesus. He’s put the omnipresent God, He’s put the entirety of his everlasting love and promises, He’s put his entire plan to get you, me and the world to his side in glory, He’s put that enormous gift into a tiny little package, and then he placed that package in Mary’s womb, in the manger, into Simeon’s arm. A tiny little baby, an enormous free gift to us all!

Did you ever notice that when we are done with communion, we sing Simeon’s song? Every time! We’ll do it again in just a few minutes. Why Simeon’s song, why every time. It’s not just because we are staunchly traditional and that is the way we’ve always done it, but because of the truths involved. In communion we have the gigantic gift of full and free forgiveness wrapped up the little package of some bread and wine. We have our Savior God himself in our hands, we behold the wonders of forgiveness and salvation. And after seeing salvation with our eyes, (and tasting it our tongues) we can go forth in the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven. Simeon’s song so properly sums up our emotions and feelings at the moment – is there a better song to sing?

Luke 2:25-32

And more than just singing Simeon's song, let's make our whole life a song of praise. Let's thank God for the miracle of faith, forgiveness and everlasting life but seeking to live for him. Let's strive to make his will our will. Let's serve others in his place that more might see a shining example of faith in Christ. Let's look to share Simeon's message with others – that they also might know that Jesus is the world's Savior. Through our proclamation – others may come to see their salvation as well. They might be given the peace that we share, peace that comes only through Jesus.

Good things happen to people at Christmas time – that doesn't make them Christmas miracles! But the fact that God put faith into Simeon's his heart and the Savior into his arms most certainly is **A Christmas Miracle**. The fact that God gives us the same faith and the same forgiveness from the baby that Simeon held is **A Christmas Miracle** as well. The fact that we can see him for who he is and believe what he tells us about himself – that's **A Christmas Miracle**.