



The Nunc Dimittis

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. [St. Luke 2:29-32]

“Now you let depart,” appears as a post—communion canticle only occasionally in the ancient tradition, and also occasionally in the early Lutheran sources. This canticle is often treated as a “proper;” that is, a part of the service that varies from week to week, but since Wilhelm Löhe’s selection of the *Nunc Dimittis* in his 1844 *Agenda* it has become virtually an “ordinary” in many Lutheran churches. One might suspect this is so because it so clearly proclaims what Lutheran churches in particular believe the Lord has just brought about for us in his Supper, namely, his true presence in body and blood, under the bread and wine, and to deliver nothing less than forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Whose words are these, and what is the occasion of their first recitation (Luke 2:25-35)? Why are these words exceptionally fitting for those who have received the Lord’s Supper? How has God been more gracious to you today, even than to the original singer of these words?

Considering the promise that he received what does Simeon mean when he says, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...?” When you take those words into your mouth, having received the body and blood of Jesus in His Supper, what do you therefore mean by them? [Philippians 4:11-13; 1 John 1:1-10]

Simeon says his eyes have seen the Lord’s salvation, but how were his eyes informed, as to what he was seeing? He saw a baby, but no ordinary baby! What have your eyes seen, informed by the Word of God, that ordinary eyes have not here seen? Simeon’s words reach already beyond Simeon, speaking of the salvation prepared “*before the face of all people,*” the glory of God’s people and light to the Gentiles.

As we prepare to go out from the Divine Service to render service in the world, Simeon’s words remind us that the word of God we bear is to be shared to give others around us eyes to see the salvation that is for them in Jesus Christ—done before the whole world in His crucifixion and resurrection, but seen for what it is only by those who are made wise by His Word.

May we go forth from this place not only singing but also living the words, “*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,*” so that those who see and hear may with us believe.

The Peace of the Lord be with you always,

Pastor Jeff Patterson †