

Sermon – Luke 2:22-40
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Grace Lutheran Church
1 Christmas – Year B
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“The Unredeemed Redeemer”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. On this final day of the year, I have a confession to make. I can't ice skate. Yes, our kids play ice hockey. Yes, I'm nearly 50 years old and should have picked it up by now. Most of all, yes, I'm from Wisconsin where people do that sort of thing, and someone should have taught me when I was younger and still capable of acquiring new skills. Whenever this information about my winter sports deficiency comes up, I am met with incredulity. *You can't ice skate?* Alas, it's true, which I proved again this past week. We found ourselves at the Roseville Skating Center in Minnesota, home to North America's largest sheet of refrigerated outdoor ice (in case you were wondering where *that* is). The kids cajoled me into renting a pair of skates, which they convince me to do every five to seven years. Over the course of two hours, I only fell once. I also made it around the oval only twice, mostly by hanging onto the sidewall and entirely to the amusement of my family, who kept zipping past me. Someone should have taught me when I was younger, but this particular rite of passage was passed over. Since my parents did pretty well, otherwise, I'll let it slide that I'll never gracefully glide along the ice.
2. Some rites of passage are less optional for parents. So it is that today, on the Seventh Day of Christmas, we find ourselves in the Temple with Mary and Joseph, on the fortieth day since Jesus was born. Luke's narrative combines two separate rituals, in fact: the purification of the mother after childbirth

and the dedication of the firstborn son to God. Mary and Joseph are compelled to undertake these rites, as Luke makes clear by referencing God's Law throughout this passage. But something more is happening, too, for while Jesus was born in little Bethlehem, it is Jerusalem and its Temple that represent the hopes and dreams held by the people of God, people like Simeon and Anna.

3. This movement between the humble and the hopeful plays out in the scene before us. Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Son of God, has not simply deigned to take on human flesh. God chose people of great faith but low net worth to be the parents of Jesus. A pair of turtledoves or pigeons is indeed the sacrifice stipulated by the law, but only for hardship cases who could not afford a lamb. But Simeon sees in this child the fulfillment of the hopes of his people, the Messiah that he was promised to see. The peace proclaimed by the whole heavenly host on Christmas night is now seen and felt on the ground, a peace which is stronger than death. Simeon can depart in peace – from the Temple, from the world – for light and glory have come to all people. Anna, too, sees in this child the hope for which the people waited. Anna, an echo of Hannah who bore Samuel, erupts in praise to God. What a scene, of Simeon and Anna, these two who have almost outlived their hope, only to have it show up in the baby boy brought to the Temple by Mary and Joseph.
4. Anna praises God, speaking to all who looked for the redemption of Jerusalem. But Jesus himself is unredeemed. What I mean is this: the Law mandated that parents present their firstborn son to God but could then – and usually would – redeem him, buy him back from God at the price of five shekels. But nothing is said here of such a transaction, and in a passage full of detail, the omission can't be incidental or accidental. Mary and Joseph, filled with the same hopes and fears felt by all new parents, nevertheless release

Jesus fully unto God for the sake of God's purposes. Jesus, the child unredeemed, is the Christ who will redeem this whole creation.

5. The work of redemption will not be easy, of course. Simeon, echoing Mary's revolutionary Magnificat, speaks of how Jesus will upend the powers of this world. Make no mistake, the powers of this world will oppose him. Mary will suffer great grief, her soul pierced to see her Son pierced with nails and spear, as we sung in a Christmas hymn just a few minutes ago. But it is precisely there, on the cross of Calvary, that the birth of Bethlehem fulfills its promise. Then, from the empty tomb, comes forth the promise that God will finally say no to our "no," will say yes to us. Redeemed, we are orphaned no longer, but adopted children of a loving Abba, siblings to Christ our Lord.
6. Here at the close of another year, we know there is much left to be done. 2023 was, in many ways, full of sin and failure, in ways much bigger than my continued inability to ice skate. The powers of this world act with violence, ignoring the peace proclaimed by angels, by Simeon. We continue to live shackled by racism, polarization, mistrust, and fear, our lives crying out for redemption. Will 2024 be better? Worse? I am not a prophet like Anna, and I dare not guess, other than to say that, like most years, it will no doubt be a mixed bag. But not a hopeless one. Never a hopeless one. For our eyes have seen the salvation of our God, a light that may flicker in this world's winds but will never go out.
7. It is fitting, it seems to me, that we hear of aged Simeon and Anna on this Sunday bookended by Saturday funerals, yesterday for Jim Scherer, next week for Bill Brown. At 97 and 93, Jim and Bill saw a great deal of life. And they both helped us to see what they saw, the gift of salvation which gave them faith to leave this world without fear, knowing that Christ had redeemed them, that their way home to the Father was not in danger or doubt. Inspired by the saints who have gone before us, may we enter the new

year with peace in our hearts, ready to do the hard work for peace in this world. Dwelling in the new Temple that is Jesus, we rejoice that he was born and lived for us, that he has passed through death and lives now forever, our Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.