

After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Luke 2: 21-40

“Called to Gift”

(01/01/2012)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

God’s peace with you!

Let us read together the sermon text for this week. You find the text in the New Testament Section on page 59. It is Luke, chapter 2. We read the verses 21-40 and start therewith one verse earlier than proposed.

Jesus Is Named

21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’),²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this

man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

AMEN

So let us collect some opinions, what this text might be able to tell us. Is this a simple historical story or what could speak to us today in the beginning of 2012? ...

The old Romans named their children often in the order of their birth: Primus [preimes], secundus [secuendes], tertius [toersches] ... the First, the Second, the Third.

But usually parents find a name for their children as it is told in the paradise story of Genesis 2 (vss.19 & 20): Adam looks in his loneliness for a counterpart. God answers Adam in a doubled way: First she brings him animals, so that he could name them. But in opposite of the traditional interpretation this naming is NOT the first act of human power exertion over the animals; it is rather a piece of primary love and poetry; it is the longing for love, which makes us still in our days talking with our house animals as fellow creatures. In a second step God gave Adam, the first MAN, a partner, whose equal ranking Adam expresses already in his name giving (Gen 2:23): "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Wo-MAN (Hebrew: Ischah), for out of Man this one was taken.' When parents consider a name of a child, it is usually already the

beginning of a loving praise, thankfulness and all-encompassing hoping. For a girl we might watch out for an actress, singer, flower or fairy-tale figure; And we wish our baby-girl the same beauty, kindness and success in life as we associate with the name. For a baby-boy we might pick the name of the father, grandfather, a famous man or the hero of a myth. Sometimes parents name their child after the name of a saint so that the life of this holy person might become role-model for the child, maybe also the parents. Luke knows though an old Egypt myth that the name of a child can tell us also something about the true character of the newborn, provided by God: Jesus shall be his name, “The Savior” – as the angel told Mary.

The Old Egyptians told the story of Si-Osire [**Si-oseir**], which means “Son of Osiris” [O-**sei**-ris], who was the God of Death and Resurrection. Like Jesus Si-Osire [**Si-oseir**] was born by a virgin. His mom Mehuschet had received in a dream the message of this virgin birth, while his Dad, the Highpriest (Setom [Sietm]) Chaemwese [Tschim-**wies**] received in another dream his name; As Highpriest Setom [Sietm] Chaemwese [Tschim-**wies**] praised once a rich man and his gorgeous funeral – compared with the wimpy funeral of a poor man. There showed his son Si-Osire [**Si-oseir**] him in a vision the divine Last Judgment and that there no value is set on pomp and wealth, but on the doing of justice on earth. “Who is good on earth, to this person will be done good in death. Who was bad on earth, to this person will be done bad in death.” While the bad person will be tortured after his death, the good person will sit as a man of God close to the throne of Osiris – as Jesus will augur [**o**-ger] later his

disciples.

But the Egyptian Myth proofs how long before Jesus coming the religion in old Egypt had already changed from the outwardness of the Pharaoh-worship to an inwardly moral and (magic) afterworld faith. With his parable [páe-rebl] about the rich man and Lazarus Luke picks up in his 16th chapter this religious motive he found already in Egypt. Christianity tied in where the religiousness of the Egyptian people had been at that time. In Jesus name “The Savior” hints already one of Luke’s main topics in his gospel: Jesus will advocate radically for the spiritual and material poor and will wish to hell all the ignorant wealth, which doesn’t care about the needs of its neighbor.

But in all his references to the Egyptian and Greek myths Luke has a great interest to root Jesus in his own, the Jewish religiousness; that’s the reason, why he stresses his circumcision. Explicit is also underlined that Jesus Mom followed all Mosaic Cleaning Rules; it should be made clear how Jesus’ family was loyal to the Jewish law. Nevertheless is in Luke’s version the baby Jesus brought for its circumcision into the spiritual centre of Israel, the Temple. But there was no law to bring the first-born into the temple. The circumcision was usually done by the father, barely by the mother, later by a doctor or special called person – but never by a priest. Luke sees the circumcision obviously happen in the light of 1. Samuel, first chapter: Here is the story told how Hannah, wife of Elkanah, was not able to give birth, how God helped her to give birth to Samuel and how she

dedicated him therefore to God (vss. 27-28): ²⁷*For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him.* ²⁸*Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.'*

All four gospels report, how radical Jesus criticized later the teachers of the law and the priests; this is understandable only for someone, who grew up within an institutionalized religion, longing to experience God's passion, but finding this passion only BEYOND the strong rules of the religious institution. Who ever left once for example for this reason the catholic or any other religious institution has with Jesus this conflict in common. Sometimes we have to overcome a discrepancy between religiousness and humanity, between worship and advocacy for life.

Exactly this is, what Simeon was waiting for in the Temple of God and found in Jesus: That God would become touchable again, full of live, warm and liberating for a fulfilled and human life. In the old Simeon as well the aged prophet Hannah, who had dedicated her long life as widow in the Temple to God, the prophecy of the prophet Joel (2:28) gets fulfilled: The old people will be filled with dreams and the young people will be full of visions. What would happen, if we all, all generations would rise, with burning hearts, full of faith, love and enthusiasm, starting to tear down the walls the so called pragmatists, realists and makers of the power have built up between us, between us and creation, destroying a functioning, solidly united national and global human family?

People like Simeon and Hannah have saved the visions of their youth. They proof themselves as still loving people, as longing humans, as active waiting people of faith. Hannah is a 84 yo widow, who was only allowed to experience seven years of marriage – but she goes on to believe in a love, which is eternal in the world, God has created. And Simeon will hang on unconditionally to the fact that he is only born to witness the salvation – stopping to believe in it would be for him the death.

And where does Simeon know from that the child he holds in his hands is the promised Messiah? Neither him nor the shepherds before him have any proof for it. But the child in his arms will say later as adult (Luke 18:17): “*Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will never enter it.*” Simeon himself has stayed obviously in his faith this gorgeous child; and only through his child-eyes he is able to recognize the salvation in this world. In his child-being Simeon manages to resist with us the heroic fanaticism and the sneering cynicism of our financial market mechanisms; With Simeon we trust our completion in God.

It is typical for this scene, for the birth-legend of a world savior and Child-God that the future life and death are already reflected in this beginning. Simeon prophecies the mother (vss. 34&35): ‘*This child is destined [des-tind] for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*’ ... Mary

will feel as if a sword would pierce her soul, when 30 years later a soldier will pierce Jesus' side with a lance, hanged at a cross to die. The praise for her son's birth will change later to slander: child of a whore (Talmud), insurgent (Luke 23:5), blasphemer (Luke 22:71) or demoniac (Luke 11:15).

For us, who we go with today into a new year, remains as message: Who knows about the truth, doesn't need to be proved correct. For us is important to simply do, what is right – it will work itself. With Simeon and Hannah we keep Jesus alive in our hearts. Mary shared her love with her son and her visions with him. I am sure they had a mother-child relationship as we all had with our own mom. They discussed and related to one another as we did and do with our parents. Build on this love, which God shared with Mary and Mary with her son -as our moms with us, we should be prepared to go into this New Year with all straightforwardness and our hopes. May God be with us on this way!

AMEN!