

# Christmas 1

*“Simeon blessed them saying, ‘Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.’”*

Today, Simeon, the OT prophet, in speaking to Mary, speaks to the Church of the New Testament.

In blessing her, He blesses you. . . And what a strange blessing it is.

For today you are blessed to know the divisive nature of the Christ.

You are told that the Child in your bosom *“is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel”*

Where Jesus is present, there is no middle ground.

He is either for you the foundation of your entire existence, or He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

*“The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”*

Thus, the more the Gospel is made available, the more strife and conflict arise.

For He is and remains *“a sign which will be spoken against.”*

He is set as the target of Satan and his legions until the end of the world.

But at the same time, the more the Gospel is available, the greater is the strength, wisdom and grace of those who believe increase.

The difference between those who are built-up by this Child and those who are stirred up against Him is the difference between faith and unbelief.

In this, *“the thoughts of many hearts are revealed.”*

And lest you think that this division of hearts and revelation of the inner thoughts will leave you unscathed, know that, *“a sword will pierce your own soul also.”*

This division happens not only outside of you—between believers and non-believers—it happens right within you.

Christ’s coming to you in Gospel and Sacrament reveals the unbelief that lurks within your own heart—putting it to death.

For, *“The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

This is the blessing that you receive today—to know Christ in truth.

You are called today to believe and confess THIS Jesus as the true God.

You shall not set up any other gods.

When you see others falling away do not use this as reason to doubt.

Just because someone else might live contrary to the Word of God does not give you reason to disobey God—no matter how long they have been doing it or how much you may look up to them.

When others speak against the Christ, do not join in but rather confess Him boldly.

If you hear someone deny the reality of the Lord’s Supper, remember that He is the sign which is spoken against and speak to confess the blessings found there.

If you hear someone speak against the blessings which come from the hearing of preaching and absolution, or the receiving of Baptism, do not join in the

speaking against Christ or waver in your faith because of it, but rather be reminded that the words of Simeon continue in effect.

And then, when the sword of God’s Word pierces your own heart and destroys the comfortable existence that you had before you heard it, you must not reject the Word on this account.

For that would be evidence of rejecting the Christ-child that Simeon describes and instead setting up a different God for yourself.

Instead believe the Word which comes from God and know that the sword in your heart is a by-product of the Gospel and a sure sign of Jesus’ presence.

Only idolatry rejects the certainty of Christ’s presence and lifts up in His place a different, seemingly more comfortable Christ.

It was for just this idolatry that the true God, Jesus Christ had to be lifted up like a monument of ridicule to the world.

People who passed by Him wagged their heads and laughed in scorn in four different languages.

*“Even the rulers with the people sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.’”*

And it was precisely in His being lifted up as a sign to the nations that Jesus paid the price for you who have lifted up another God in His place.

The ridicule that He endured was for the ridicule of those who reject His Word.

The rejection that He felt was from those who reject Him today.

The spear that pierced His side spilled out the blood which heals your pierced heart.

What is more, Jesus’ being set as a sign that is spoken against did not end when His body was taken down from the cross.

But it continues to this very day, every time His body and blood are lifted up before the congregation.

For here is the same Jesus, come to you to be destined for the fall and rising of many in this place and for a sign that is spoken against.

And you are blessed to hear this and to confess it plainly to all those who look for the redemption of Jerusalem—like Anna, the prophetess.

This Jesus who is lifted up in the Sacrament is the same Jesus who baptizes and preaches giving out His Holy Spirit and causing your hearts to believe.

And it is by this Spirit, given from the Christ-child that you, yourselves grow and become strong in the Spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God rests upon you—for this is true of Christ and His Christians.

Do you wish to be numbered with those who confess Christ rather than speak against Him?

Do you wish to rise because of Him and not fall?

Do you desire that the thoughts of your heart may be purified so that when they are revealed it is not to your shame?

For this you have Christ here today who gives you all these things in the Word which you hear.

So He has become your Savior. In all your affliction, He is afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saves you; in His love and pity He redeemed you.