

First Sunday after Christmas
December 27, 2020

“Behold...the cause of the falling and rising of many – this Child, Jesus”
(Luke 2:34)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this first Sunday after Christmas, is from our reading from Luke 2.

“Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against. (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:34-35)

Here ends our text.

Falling and rising. The stock market analysts’ job is to keep people abreast of which stocks are on the rise and which ones are falling. They’ll tell you which stocks to get out of your portfolio and which to put in. The sports commentators also talk about the risers and the fallers. They’ll tell you which teams are on the rise toward making the playoffs and which teams are in bad shape.

Our text isn’t talking about something as impersonal as stocks or teams. It’s talking about real people. It’s talking about you and me. For everyone in this world is either a riser or a faller.

Now, I know Simeon was getting up in age, but this text isn’t talking about older people stumbling and losing their balance. No, it’s talking about all people either being raised up from the depths of sin and standing firm on the Rock of our salvation, or stumbling on Jesus by not believing in Him, and seeing Jesus as a Rock of offense. (Romans 9:32-33)

“Behold”, the Holy Spirit says, is speaking through His servant Simeon. There’s that neon blinking light again saying, “your undivided attention, please! So, we heard earlier in Luke 2 on Christmas Eve, the angel, God’s messenger, tell the world, **“Behold, I have good tidings of great joy which shall be for all people.**

For born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior who is the Christ the Lord.” Good tidings, not bad news, great joy, not just a little cheer, and it’s for all people not just some. Simeon’s message is the same. It comes 40 days later, but it hasn’t changed. God’s word is eternal. It comes to us this morning. And, again, this is very important to hear what follows the “behold”!

Everyone is impacted by the coming of this Child. You either rise or fall because of him. There is no neutral ground. Yesterday on the December 26th, the church remembered St. Stephen. After a long discourse in Acts 6 recounting the history of the fathers of Israel who rejected the coming Messiah, Stephen says,

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

And their reaction wasn’t belief, but a falling - a complete rejection of Jesus. **But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”**

The Holy Spirit who told Simeon that Jesus was in the temple so that he could hold Him and gaze upon Him with his own eyes, also opened heaven for Stephen so that he gazed upon Jesus. It was his final gaze, but the most beautiful, for Stephen was then stoned to death. He was stoned by those who were falling – falling to hell. Meanwhile, Stephen’s spirit rose to Jesus in heaven.

Simeon, like Stephen, could now depart in peace, having been told that he would not die before seeing the promised Messiah. An old man and an old woman, Anna are the risers in today’s gospel reading. For though they waited many years for this day, they never lost hope and the Holy Spirit who calls people to faith, kept these two in the faith until the moment came.

The same Holy Spirit does no less for each of us. He calls us into the faith through the hearing of His message through the angels’ words or human prophets. And, only by the Holy Spirit can we see Jesus and say He is my Lord! The Holy Spirit seals our faith through baptism so that we are united to Jesus death and resurrection and rise to newness of life.

Today, December 27th, is the day that we remember also how the Holy Spirit called John into the ministry and inspired him to write in the first chapter of John,

He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

There are only two groups of people in this world – those who do not receive Jesus – those who fall, and those who receive Him – those who rise. God alone causes someone to rise in faith and become a child of God. Man’s will cannot achieve this. It is only of God. Man can, of course, reject the will of God and then suffer the consequences by falling into condemnation.

Peter repented, but Judas despairs and falls. One robber on the cross repents and rises to paradise that same day. The other robber taunts and rejects the Christ who hangs next to him and falls into eternal condemnation.

Tomorrow, on the 28th of December we remember the Holy innocents who died in the faith because they suffered all, even death, rather than fall away at the hand of Herod. They rose on account of their faith in Jesus.

Paul, who watched Stephen be put to death, was called by the Holy Spirit to repent and was baptized. He wrote these words in his epistle to the Romans in chapter 9.

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written:

**“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”**

Yes, even the Gentiles are called to faith and receive the righteousness in Christ which is of faith. All who believe on Him, the Christ Child, Jesus, the Messiah will not be put to shame!

“Behold” God says and yet this sinful world beholds many things other than the message of the angels, and Simeon, and Stephen and John during this Christmas season. It is a season of lights, but many fall because they don’t see the Light that came into the world.

Others, think that if they try to be less naughty and more nice, then that will give them peace in their hearts. But, trying to keep the law is in vain. For there is no peace in the law. It is a stumbling block and will cause eternal shame.

There is only peace in found in the Christ child whom Simeon held in his arms. **“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”**

We behold the story of Simeon and see that we are included in it! For we are the Gentiles. God has not excluded us but, on the contrary, has purposefully been inclusive to us. Simeon saw the salvation in his arms which God has prepared for all people, including you and me.

In faith, we also wait for Jesus’ final coming. Having already seen Him by the power of the Holy Spirit, we await the day when we will behold Him when He returns. Simeon waited a long time. Maybe our wait will be long. Maybe it will be short. But whenever Jesus returns, we will see our Consolation in the flesh – the Consolation of Israel and all Gentiles.

As we wait, we wait in peace. For our sins are pardoned by the blood of Jesus. Our eternal debt has been paid. And because of His resurrection our final rising is assured.

Yes, this Christ Child has been destined to die and rise again that the thoughts of your hearts would be revealed -that you would confess Jesus before the world like Stephen, and the Holy Innocents, and Simeon and Anna and John and all the cloud of witnesses that have gone before and have risen with Jesus.

Blessed Christmas to you as you confess Jesus, and rise daily to newness of life in the Light of the world! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)