

*A Glimpse of Glory*

January 1, 2012 Christmas 1B

Luke 2:22-40

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Every once in awhile, in the middle of our humdrum lives, we get a glimpse of glory. Our football team signs a promising young quarterback and the fans instantly label them Super Bowl favorites. A fairytale wedding happens in England and the world proclaims it a match for the ages. A new president gets elected to office and the country dreams of better days yet to come.

Here's what I'm wondering: as we experience these events, what have we really seen? We've seen a press conference with the new quarterback decked out in our team's jersey. We've seen a resplendent ceremony with the bride and groom standing before an altar. We've seen a campaign trail filled with adoring crowds and one unbelievable promise after another. So...are these sights enough? Are they enough to get our hopes up?

How about another scenario? A new baby is born. Mom and dad have come to the temple to present their first-born son to the Lord. Suddenly a weathered old man scoops up the baby in his arms. For some inexplicable reason, the old man is giddy with delight. He's so giddy, in fact, that his worn out legs suddenly have a new spring to their step. And before the parents head home, the old man says something utterly remarkable: "This is enough for me now. I've seen God's salvation. I can depart in peace."

I've said things like that before, crazy things. The Twins win the World Series and I had tickets to Game 7. *I can die now.* I climb to the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro, the rooftop of Africa, and touch the glaciers as I go. *I can die now.* I spend the month of September at Holden Village with the mountain Aspen trees a shimmering gold. *I can*

*die now*. I've made that claim more than once...but I didn't mean it. Old Simeon means it. He witnesses the birth of the Christ Child and promptly announces, "I can die now."

It's amazing, isn't it, because what has Simeon really seen? It's just a little baby in his arms, a powerless, speechless newcomer to the world. Whatever salvation this baby might bring is still only a hope and a dream. Whatever teaching he might offer will remain hidden for years to come. Nothing has happened. King Herod is still up to his old tricks. Augustus Caesar still rules from afar. The promised peace has not yet come.

But that doesn't stop Simeon. He gets his hopes up. He stands there in grateful wonder. It's the future he holds in his arms. He has seen it. He has touched it. It is enough, he says. And then Anna gets into the act too. She's every bit as old as Simeon. She adds her own joy to the moment. She'll soon be telling everyone about this incredible baby whom she saw for just a few minutes.

How is it that Simeon and Anna and—for that matter—the whole cast of Christmas characters, hold on to as much hope as they do? By the time Jesus is grown up and ready to go to work, Simeon and Anna will be long dead. So will most of the shepherds who came to see the child in the manger; and possibly Joseph who watched over him; and the magi who came to worship him. Thirty years or more will pass before the gospel story resumes. In the meantime, those who saw the baby will not know what became of him. They will know only what they heard and saw back then. And what they saw was merely a glimpse of glory. How did they do it?

Isn't that our question too? It's a faith question. How do we hang on to hope when the world around us isn't all that hopeful? When you think about it, what *we* have seen is hardly more than what *they* saw. Herod is still up to his old tricks and Augustus

Caesar is still on the throne. There is very little peace on earth. And the world isn't much better than before.

So, what do we really have in the birth of this baby? It depends on what we're looking for, I suppose. We have sacred scripture, like Simeon and Anna, which speaks to us of hope and attentiveness in the promises of God. We have something like the shepherds would have had, recalling all their lives a night of mysterious glory. We have something like the magi would have brought back to their homelands, a vision of a different kind of king and kingdom. And, let's not forget, we have children who've been entrusted into our arms for blessings, and who will, we hope, live on after us.

We have merely a glimpse of glory, a glimpse into God's good future. Is it enough? It is for Simeon. After laying eyes on the child, he breaks into song: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace. I've seen your salvation. I can see that it's meant for the whole world."

Simeon's song, in case you didn't know, is called the *Nunc Dimittis*. It's Latin for "Now, Lord." Now, Lord, I'm trusting that whatever sliver of hope I've lived on all these years is finally coming to pass. Now, Lord, I can depart in peace.

In the liturgy, the *Nunc Dimittis* is sometimes sung after communion. That's fitting. After all, when we come to the table, what are we doing but seeing and tasting the promised future? Like Simeon, we hold the Christ child in our hands. We take bread and wine to our lips and kiss it. We may not get all the way to the future ourselves, not in this lifetime. But we have seen it from afar, and that's enough, we say, now we can depart in peace.

Another Christmas has come and gone. January is upon us. We're back to our humdrum lives. What have we seen? A child sleeping in a manger, some curious shepherds and wise men who come to pay him homage, an old man and woman who proclaim him the hopes and dreams of all the years. We have seen *something*, but whatever it is, it's still unfolding.

As we head into a new year, how do we hang on to hope when the world around us isn't all that hopeful? The same way old Simeon did, by worshipping the Christ Child, by singing a song of faith, by entrusting our future to God's good future.

Is it enough? Is it enough to get our hopes up? In faith, we say *yes*, it's enough for now. Amen.