



## CHRISTMAS STORIES

### Simeon's Friend's Story

***(Simeon shared his passionate expectation – he knew God would answer – listen as this friend reflects on the outcome)***

I just got the news this morning. Simeon's dead. He died in his sleep last night. The Temple here won't be the same without him. But he died happy, for last week he saw what he had waited a lifetime to see.

I've spent many days, many years in this Temple. Not nearly as many as Simeon, but somehow the place is almost home. I'm a Levite, having served here from my teen years on, helping the priests, preparing for the great festivals, assisting in the day to day activities of worship. It was here I first met Simeon, some thirty years ago. He seemed an old man then! He lived a good, full life.

Simeon was righteous and devout – he loved the Temple services, the sacrifice, the worship. When I first knew him he still spent much of his time in the community, caring for the poor. But as the years passed and he got older yet, he seemed to spend less and less time doing anything other than praying and reading the Scriptures. He soaked in the Scripture – reveled in it. He had great portions of it memorized, reciting them often in the hearing of us all. I would sit enraptured by the words, captured by the passionate love in his voice. He liked me. He'd often look in my direction when he spoke out those prophecies, the words of promise pouring out from the storehouse of his memory. He seemed encouraged by my attentiveness. I couldn't help it – the words gripped me, as they did him.

Those Scriptures were his strength and inspiration. They welled up in him, a great hope. He was waiting, he said, for the Consolation of Israel. That's what the Rabbis call Messiah, the One the Lord promised through the prophets centuries ago, the One who would come to set our people free. Simeon was waiting. He hoped, with all his heart, the Lord would send Messiah soon.

His lips would tremble and his eyes mist as he quoted the great prophecies of Isaiah. The Lord says:

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him  
and he will bring justice to the nations ..."*

*"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.  
I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,  
to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."*

He'd always stop right at that point. His eyes, which were closed, would open, and he'd say, "We need a Saviour like that! To open blind eyes. To set us free! To give light, not just to us, but to Gentiles, too! To the nations! Oh, how we need it!"

And then he'd go on reciting:

*"I am the Lord; that is my name! ...  
See, the former things have taken place,  
and new things I declare;  
before they spring into being  
I announce them to you."*

I still remember the day, some dozen years ago now, with a small crowd gathered, he spoke those final words, and then, as the others drifted away, I lingered, and he looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes and he said: "He's done that, you know. He's announced what He's going to do. He told me, long ago, I won't die until I see it happen – until I see Messiah."

It was like a wind up my spine. Like a still, small voice riveting my attention. Simeon wasn't kidding. He was absolutely sure. Prophecy was alive. He would see the fulfilment before he died. How did he know?

Afterwards, every time I heard him recite that Scripture – and it was often – his eyes would sparkle in my direction, in conspiracy, as if to say: "Before it comes to pass, he's announced it – I will see my salvation with my own two eyes!"

He couldn't help himself. Isaiah's words kept spilling out of him as if he were a cup of wine, filled to the brim, shaken in the hand of some glad reveler. The prophecies of Messiah poured forth.

*The Lord will lay bare his holy arm  
in the sight of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth will see  
the salvation of our God.*

Well, the news came not quite two months ago – odd, surprising, unexpected news. It was the shepherds who brought it, gossiping as they delivered their sheep. They'd come from Bethlehem, some ten kilometers from the city here, where they tended flocks for the Temple sacrifice.

Simeon was right here. He heard every word.

They were words that stirred scornful looks on most faces, faces that smirked, paying little attention, discounting it all as ramblings of uneducated, unsanctified "people of the land".

I probably would have smirked, too, but for the look on Simeon's face.

The shepherds' news was absolutely incredible. A tale of angels singing in the night sky overhead as they watched their flocks. Angels announcing the birth of a baby; a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a stable's feeding trough. A baby, the angels said, who would be a Saviour – Messiah the Lord.

It was at the name "Messiah" that Simeon's face startled. I heard him gasp, sucking in his breath. His eyes froze as the words penetrated his heart. And then, like clouds scattering from before the sun, astonishment dissolved and his face, tilted upwards, fairly shone with bursting joy.

Such news!

But nothing came of it. The shepherds, gossiping still, withdrew from sight, fading from view. It was as if their news would fade, too – but for Simeon's still-shining face.

No, nothing came of the news. Nothing at all.

Not until last week.

Last week I was assisting in that part of the Temple where couples come to dedicate their firstborn son to the Lord. It's a simple ceremony – the child is presented to the priest, two short prayers are said, and then the redemption money for the firstborn is given by the parents. There had already been a number of presentations that day. Nothing unusual. And here came another couple, ordinary indeed. Poor. They'd come to redeem their son and to offer the sacrifice of purification for the mother – two young pigeons – the offering of the lowly. Nothing unusual. Everything so very ordinary.

But right at that moment, Simeon came forward. I caught the look on his face – the trembling lips, the misty eyes, the face tilted upwards, shining with bursting joy. Like when he recited Isaiah's prophecies. Like when he heard the shepherds' news.

He came to this couple and with eyes intent on the child, he took him in his arms. He cradled him lovingly. Then, holding him upwards, in his big gnarled hands at arms length, he looked in his eyes. And Simeon's own, through the mist, were gleaming. No longer ordinary. No longer commonplace. A mundane ceremony interrupted by the music of age-old prophecy. Simeon, with breathless wonder, whispered to the child, "At last, here you are."

Then, raising his voice heavenward, he said:

*"Sovereign Lord, as You have promised,  
You now dismiss Your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
which You have prepared in the sight of all people,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to Your people Israel."*

I looked from Simeon's eyes to the parents. Amazed as I, they reveled in his words.

But it was the child himself who drew all our attention. In Simeon's hands, still outstretched, cradling the wonder, was One to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, to release from the dungeon those in darkness, bringing hope to the nations. There in Simeon's hands was salvation. His. Mine.

That was just a week ago. Simeon died in his sleep last night. But he'd seen what he'd waited a life-time to see.

And the baby? Jesus, they called him. Have we seen Him since? No, we've not seen Him. But we will. For I have inherited Simeon's hope:

*"The Lord will lay bare His holy arm  
in the sight of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth will see  
the salvation of our God."*