

“Where is your God?” Luke 2:22-40

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

This is a very interesting part of the gospel according Luke. It is also very significant for us today. Luke describes testimonies of two people, righteous and devout man Simeon, and prophetess Anna.

When Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple according to the demands of the laws of Moses, they both, Simeon and Anna, led by the Holy Spirit came to Jesus and praised God for His salvation.

What do you think about this event? Isn't it strange? Try to picture how all of this happened! Joseph and Mary traveled to Jerusalem to present Jesus at the temple, and to bring the required sacrifice. As all faithful believers did in those days.

The temple was quite an impressive building. Remember how the apostles were showing it to Jesus, marveling about the greatness of the temple. *How did* Simeon and Anna find Joseph and Mary among all those who daily visited the temple?

They were not somehow distinct from others? Simply a couple with a little baby. How did Joseph and Mary react after Simeon and Anna uttered their message? Suddenly in the Temple someone comes to you and says these words...

But the most surprisingly, how could Simeon and Anna come to this little baby boy and treat Him as ... God's salvation plan? As God's salvation for all, for all people... As God's redemption? As a light to the Gentiles.

That means, for all people and also for us. Picture this... the temple, this usual couple, husband and wife, and this little baby... and to see in Him the salvation, the light and the peace for all people? How could they? How?

What was their understanding about God? Today we will try to answer to this one question – where is your God? Have you thought about it? Do you know where is your God? Can you show or tell it to others?

We can start with this very popular answer... God is everywhere. Yes? No? Yes, of course, we can agree to this statement? Sure, He is the Creator, He creates everything and He continually holds together His creation.

This is clear a testimony of the Bible, that He is everywhere and He knows everything and that nothing happens without His knowledge. So far so good. Almost everyone who believes that there is someone higher can agree with this statement. God is everywhere...

Yes, but He is also in a thunderstorm, He is in a volcano eruption, He is in a tsunami, He is also in an earthquake, and so on. He is everywhere. That's true. But where do you meet Him? Where do you go to meet Him?

Or - where do you have access to Him? Where can you find Him? We are physical beings, we are not everywhere. When we want to meet someone we don't go ... everywhere. We don't agree – let's meet ... everywhere.

We are bound to space and time. We are bound to certain locations. People always had known it. That's why they always have tried to find ways how to be sure that they can get access to their gods.

This explains why people in different religions chose sacred sites to meet their gods, why they built and keep building statues for their gods and temples for their gods. It is not the case that they believe that actual statues are gods. No, not at all.

But they do understand very well that we as physical beings need to have a specific location, a specific place where we meet our gods. So that we can be sure they hear our prayers and receive our gifts.

This is how worship of different gods happens all around the world. Yes, it is self-made, but it shows one profound truth, we need to know where our God is. If we say that He is everywhere, we can as well say that He is ... nowhere.

Our Creator created us as physical beings and He has treated us as such since the very beginning. Let's just take a quick historical look at true worship as depicted in the Bible. In the garden of Eden, God set apart one particular tree.

As Dr. Martin Luther explained it so well, this was Adam's church, His altar and His pulpit. It was a particular place where God met Adam, and where Adam came to listen and to learn from God, to be in His presence.

Once Adam and Eve lost this very presence of God, He provided for people other means of access to His presence. We can read from the very first chapters of Genesis, that God Himself established the practice of worship.

Where God indicated, Abraham build an altar. There God come to Abraham to bless Him. Even better we can see it after Exodus. At the Mount Sinai God said these words.

"In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you." (Ex 20:24). In every place where I cause, that is in every place where God Himself will command to worship Him.

There, and only there He will come to you and bless you. He did in the tabernacle. God Yahweh Himself instructed how to build it and how to worship Him. Once Moses did it, a cloud covered the tent... and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. His very presence.

That was the place where God made Himself accessible to His people. Where He came to be with them and to bless them. Later God commanded Solomon to build Him a temple in Jerusalem.

When the temple was finished, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. God Himself gave this promise that in this place, in the temple, everyone will have access to him. That His eyes and His ears will be open to our prayers and to our needs.

This was the place where He came to be with His people and to bless them with His holy presence. This is where they had an access to His grace and forgiveness.

And every time when people wanted to design their own worship, or to worship God in places where God did not command them, God called it idolatry. For it was not done according to His word.

People were never allowed to worship God ... everywhere. It was simply called idolatry, or sin against the first commandment. This much about how God was present and accessible to the people of the Old Testament.

Now about the New Testament and about us. If in the Old Testament times God chose to locate Himself and to be present for us in the tabernacle and in the Temple, where was He in the New Testament? Can you guess?

Where was God's presence, where could people have access to His grace and blessings? You know the answer? Where did God dwell? Simeon and Anna knew it. Yes, in Jesus Christ. I know, it is not something we cannot understand.

It is a mystery of God. But it is a clear message of the New Testament. In Jesus the whole fullness of God dwelled bodily. As in the Old Testament times God dwelled in the Temple, now He dwelled in Jesus Christ.

It is scandalous. It is. Where is God? Everywhere. Where is God? In Jesus Christ. Where? In one man Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only begotten God – He has revealed Him to us.

The point is this, there is only one way we can have access to God. For there is only one way He has given us access to Himself. That is – in His Son, Jesus Christ. Whatever strange it may seem, but this is how God decided to make Himself accessible.

This is where He provided access to His grace and forgiveness. This is where He is with us to bless us. Now, what exactly it means for us, today? Where today is our God? Where today we have access to Him?

In His word and in His Sacraments. [!] Remember this. Whenever and wherever He speaks to us, and whenever He comes to us in the Holy Meal. Where we do what He commanded to do.

This is very important to understand and to remember. Very important. Where is your God? Where we read and meditate upon His word, where we meet to receive His Holy Meal. This is where He is. This is where you have access to His grace.

This is where He has promised to be present for you as forgiving and gracious God. To be with you, to listen to your prayers, to bless you. Once we understand where is our God, many things in the Divine service make more sense.

Why do we sit facing the altar? We can call it the Lord's Table. Why do we pray towards the altar? Why do we sing and praise God towards the altar? Why do we bow and kneel towards and at the altar? Why?

Some of Christian groups who have lost this clear teaching about God's presence with us, don't do it. They may not have the Lord's Table, the altar at all. They just pray and praise towards heaven.

As if God is not among us, or as if they could ascend into heaven with their prayers. They do it, because for them God is only everywhere... they have lost this Biblical understanding about God's real presence with us.

For them God is really absent. He is not here. He is just everywhere. And if it is so, then to whom would you bow, to whom would you show your respect and gratitude, to whom would you kneel, and sing and pray?

Where then is their God? Everywhere... and nowhere.

Thanks be to the Lord, that our church has retained this Biblical truth about God's presence. We are physical beings and He comes to us as to physical beings. We can receive Him with all our senses. That's God's gift to us.

We hear Him speaking to us with our ears. We can see His body and blood in the Holy Sacrament with our eyes. We can receive Him with our hands and we can taste and smell His presence in bread and wine.

You can be assured through all your senses that He is present right here, with you, for you, to bless you. To cleanse you from all that has to go, to give you true freedom, joy and peace. This is why we gather around the altar, around the Lord's temple.

For God Himself, in Jesus Christ is present right here. So, where is your God? In Jesus Christ. In His word and in His Sacrament. Right in the midst of us. As one of us. As our host in His Holy Meal.

Simeon and Anna were led by the Holy Spirit to recognize where their God was. You have received the same Spirit. He is with you and He leads you to Christ, where He comes to us bodily. The Holy Spirit gives us eyes of faith to see and trust what God has promised.

We are so blessed, we are so blessed not only to know where our God is, but to come into His presence and to receive His blessings. For we don't need to ascend into heaven, He has come down to be with us. We know exactly where He is. Just receive Him and give Him thanks.

Amen.