

My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation!

A man shuffled across the narrow, uneven, cobblestone alleyways of Jerusalem. On the outside he is old, but his soul has stayed young through hope. Every now and then he is asked, "Simeon, listen a moment! You always seem to give the impression that you are waiting for something to happen. Are you?" "I am." Simeon answers, "I am waiting. I am waiting for Israel's coming consolation; I am waiting for the savior."

Simeon walks the streets of Jerusalem as a living reminder: "Do not forget God's promise! Do not forget God's promise!"

"And why should it be you", he is questioned, "Who waits for the Savior?" Simeon replies, "As you well know, a man can travel far nowadays, even as far as the heathens in Rome. But I have come to myself, to my own heart: Deep within, it is inhabited by despair, the weariness of life, sins, the fear of failing, jealousy, an inferiority complex, pride, a yearning for attention and much more. Suddenly I realized that I need a savior, a redeemer. And all our old scriptures speak of he who is to come. Even our mother Eve believed she had found the redeemer in her first-born son, yet it was this son who murdered his brother. And did not Jacob call out as he was dying, 'Lord, I await your salvation!' And what about the prophets? Did they not continually see the arrival of the Messiah? Do you not know the scriptures?"

"Oh, well," they answer, "that may be. Our ancestors dreamt up some things, but who can say that what they dreamt of will come true? And can it be true that you will see the savior?" Simeon replies, "You see it is like this: Through the scriptures we learn that the savior will come. And through the Holy Spirit we learn, I learn, that he will come to me.

The prophet Isaiah writes:

Behold the Lamb of God, who will carry away the sins of the world.

*But the Holy Spirit says to me, **Behold the Lamb of God, who will carry away your sins.***

*The angel says to the shepherds ...**a savior has been born to you.***

*From the Holy Spirit I learn ...**a savior has been born to me.***

That is how I know that I will see the savior."

Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem because they were good Jews and as good Jews they wanted to fulfill their duties. They went to the Temple for two reasons.

First, Mary went to be purified. Leviticus 12:2-5 states that a woman who had given birth to a son was ritually “*unclean*” for forty days and must undergo a purification ceremony. If the child had been a girl this “*unclean*” period would last eighty days. When this time was over she would offer up a sacrifice. The scripture tells us that Mary offered two turtledoves; it was the sacrifice of the poor.

The other reason Mary and Joseph came to the temple was to present their firstborn son. Firstborn sons belonged to God and to the temple priests. But the father could buy back the son by making payment to the temple. Luke never says what happened to Jesus; if he stayed at the Temple or if he went with his parents.

The birth of Jesus is only told in two of the Gospels, Matthew and Luke. The Gospel of Matthew tries to prove Jesus’ divine nature, while Luke is much more concerned with his *human* nature.

The book of Matthew is deals with Jesus’ lineage, King Herod, wise men, matters of state, and how an infant upset everything. Luke tells the story of a family too poor to make a proper sacrifice but faithful to their Jewish heritage. No one else but Luke tells the story of the stable, a baby in a manger, and the ragtag mob of shepherds who came for a visit.

Luke also tells the story of Simeon, an old man who has the Holy Spirit as a constant companion. That day the spirit leads Simeon into the Temple, the day that Jesus is to be presented. Simeon holds the child in his arms and prays:

Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

This is Simeon’s song.

A direct translation of the child’s name from the Hebrew would not have been Jesus but Yeshua, or Joshua, which means “God who is salvation.” Simeon was looking into the

face of “God who is salvation.” Simeon is looking at the face of God. Now Simeon knows that Jesus’ salvation will extend to all people, Gentiles and Jews alike.

Simeon’s words are not words spoken by a high priest, not the words of a king; they are not even spoken within the holy of holies. Simeon is an old man who is about to die. Even though he was in communion with the Holy Spirit, nobody paid much attention to him. Joseph, Mary and the baby were a poor Jewish family trying to be faithful to the Law. They came together at the Temple, the old man waiting and the family following God’s law. Simeon experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit continually, but that day he saw God’s Messiah in the face of a baby.

Mitakuye Oyasin (Pronounced: Mee-tah-koo-yay O-yah-seen) is a Lakota Prayer that means “All My Relations.” A prayer of oneness and harmony with all that the Great Mystery placed on his creation: other people, animals, birds, insects, trees and plants, and even rocks. It reminds us that we are connected to these other parts of Creation, that we share a common kinship in the Hoop of Life. For the Lakota the earth speaks with a strong voice, and the people shape their lives with what they hear. A Mohawk prayer says:

Our Grandparents of old, they are saying, “Listen to her, all, to the Earth our Mother, to what she is saying.” People, listen all.

Life for the Lakota was a mystical adventure; an unbroken ritual lived in a world that itself had spirit. From the time a young man, or in some cases a young woman, went alone on their first vision quest until the time they died, they sought a sacred relationship with all things, from the buffalo and the sun to the smallest of insects. All these things had spirits of their own. They were also expressions of the divine. This divinity was named by various tribes as the Creator, Great Spirit, Great Mystery, Grandfather Spirit, and Wakan Tanka.

The earth was already a completed landscape for the Lakota, fully furnished with everything necessary to sustain both the physical and spiritual life. They knew about houses and buildings but it made no sense to them to build a church when the earth itself was sacred and every action of one’s life was an act of worship. The Lakota understood the link between the spirit of a bison and the souls of the people. They knew that life

comes from the earth and all life sustains all other life. The game animals gave themselves willingly only when the hunter observed proper respect for the animal. Before and after the hunt the hunter would speak ritually to an animal, explaining his need, apologizing to his fellow creature, and speeding the animal spirit back to his home. Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota chief, wrote: "The Indian loved to worship. From birth to death, he revered his surroundings. He considered himself born in the luxurious lap of Mother Earth, and no place was to him, humble. There was nothing between him and the Big Holy (Wakan Tanka). The contact was immediate and personal, and the blessings of Wakan Tanka flowed over the Indian like rain showered from the sky. Wakan Tanka was not aloof, apart, or ever seeking to quell evil forces. He did not punish the animals and the birds, and likewise, he did not punish man. He was not a punishing god. There was never a question as to supremacy of an evil power over and above the power of Good. There was but one ruling power, and that was good."

The Lakota saw Wakan Tanka, or the Great Mystery, in everything they came in contact with. In the eye of the creator, they believe that man and woman, plant and animal, water and stone, are all equal and share the earth in equal partnership with everything else that the creator made. They looked at the earth and the whole universe as a never-ending circle where they considered themselves just another creation of the Great Mystery. The Lakota end their prayers with the words:

Mitakuye Oyasin (Pronounced: Mee-tah-koo-yay O-yah-seen) All my relations.

March 23rd of next year will mark the 162nd anniversary of a donation sent to the people of Ireland from the people of the Choctaw nation. Moved by news of starvation in Ireland, a group of Choctaws gathered in Scullyville, Oklahoma, to raise a relief fund and help starving Irish men, women and children. They collected \$710, just sixteen years after their experience on the Trail of Tears, where they themselves had faced starvation. In 1996, to mark the 150th anniversary of that event, eight people from Ireland came to America to retrace the Trail of Tears.

Mitakuye Oyasin (Pronounced: Mee-tah-koo-yay O-yah-seen).

There is a bond between Native American Spirituality and Ancient Celtic Spirituality. Celtic Spirituality is the celebration of the goodness of creation. The people's livelihood

depended on the elements. Sometimes at gatherings called “ceilidhs” (Pronounced: Kay-lee) they would tell old stories, sing songs and pray. These stories, songs, and prayers would be about the skies, the effects of the sun on the earth, the moon on the tides, the ebbing of the sea and the life in the sea. Christ was referred to as the “King of the Elements, Son of the Dawn or the Son of the Light.” An amazing part of this worship of the sun and moon was the way in which the attention of the person praying would move back and forth between the physical and the spiritual. Worshippers gave thanks for the material gift of light while at the same time being aware of the spiritual light of God within creation. There is awareness that all created things carry within them the grace and goodness of God.

Celtic Spirituality believed that the image of God was at the heart of the individual. There was the conviction that to look into the face of a newborn child is to see the image of God. “*The lovely likeness of the Lord is in thy pure face.*” This is a phrase in one of the prayers of blessing on a child. The Celts also believed that by looking deeply enough into any human face, not just that of a child, we may glimpse the image of God, although often, maybe even usually, it is covered over by marks of sin and confusion. Simeon says to us:

But I have come to myself, to my own heart: Deep within, it is inhabited by despair, the weariness of life, sins, the fear of failing, jealousy, an inferiority complex, pride, a yearning for attention and much more. Suddenly I realized that I need a savior, a redeemer.

Then he holds the Christ child in his arms and as a tear rolls down his cheek he says: My eyes have seen your salvation.

Benediction:

And so God comes to us in the everyday, in the simple things. If we pay attention, we can taste the sacred in a shared meal. We can feel it in the breeze on our skin. We hear the sacred in a baby’s giggle. We can see it in the life that is all around us. May each of us see God face to face in the coming year.

Mitakuye Oyasin (Pronounced: Mee-tah-koo-yay O-yah-seen) All my relations.

Amen
