

## SESSION 1 / CHRISTIAN HOPE

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Romans 15:13).*

**Theme** Christian hope is unique: it is a gift from God, it is a desire for God, and it is fulfilled by God who calls us to trust him. It is first received at baptism.

### Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,  
send forth your Holy Spirit  
into our hearts that we might perceive,  
into our minds that we might remember,  
into our souls that we might meditate.  
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,  
tenderness and mercy.  
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses  
from beginning to end.  
May your grace help us to see with your eyes  
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.  
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high  
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

### Read the Word Luke 2:22-32 (5 mins)

Note: the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel narrate the conception and infancy of Jesus. Here, the child Jesus is presented to the temple by Mary and Joseph forty days after his birth, and the hope of Simeon is fulfilled by God.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

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.'

## Meditate on the Word 1 John 3:1-6,11,16-24 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way might my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture change me?

How might it help me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

## Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

God's promise of salvation was fulfilled when He sent His Son into the world to free us from sin and to open His own eternal beatitude to us. Christ is the fulfilment and the reason for our hope in God. Simeon experiences the fulfilment of God's promise, and he teaches us what it means to hope in God.

Simeon's hope is not common hope, a feeling of desire experienced by everyone at some time, that 'things will turn out well' or that 'it won't rain on the big day.' Simeon's hope comes from a revelation made to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Saviour. In the same way, Christian hope comes from God as His gift, received at baptism together with faith and charity. This gift of hope is a supernatural ability to desire and trust God and to wait, like Simeon, for the fulfilment of His promises. The theological virtue of hope is *from* God, given as a new promise and a new power beyond human capacity alone to know or claim.

Simeon's hope is focused on Christ. It is a hope for happiness in God, for 'the consolation of Israel', centred on the person of the Messiah. This hope is fulfilled mysteriously when Simeon sees a little Child who must have looked like every other child presented into the Temple every day. This Child is God Himself, Jesus Christ, Son of the Father! Holding Him, Simeon proclaims: 'My eyes have seen your salvation'. Yet physically, he can only see a helpless baby. It is through faith and guided by the Holy Spirit that Simeon can *see* God's salvation in the human Child. His hope, therefore, is rooted in his faith. In the same way, our hope is rooted in what we know through faith, which is God's revelation of Himself and of His salvation in Christ, handed on to us through the Church. Both faith and hope are directed to God. Faith is a supernatural power to know or 'to see' God and hope is a supernatural power to desire Him as our eternal happiness. Christian Hope is *for* God. It is fulfilled in Christ, in Whom God gives Himself to us.

Simeon's hope is fulfilled *by* God. Simeon lives in companionship with the Holy Spirit and knows how to listen to Him. In docility and obedience to the Holy Spirit, Simeon is given God's promise and is led to the Temple, to behold its fulfilment. Having waited in hope for so long, the time has come for him to see God! Yet seeing God can only happen through the power of God, through the Helper, the Holy Spirit. All Simeon can do is to keep trusting and to keep waiting, without giving up. Perhaps Simeon didn't expect that the fulfilment of God's promise would look like a tiny infant. It is the same with Christian hope. We hope, not for what we can do, but for what God will do for us, in His own way, and on His own terms. We are called to trust Him, even when appearances tell us not to. Christian hope is *in* God. It is a radical trust and confidence in God's infinite power and mercy.

## Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

## Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 33 (32). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: Blessed the nation whose God is the Lord,  
the people he has chosen as his heritage.  
From the heavens the Lord looks forth;  
he sees the whole human race.

B: From the place where he dwells he gazes  
on all the dwellers on the earth,  
he who shapes the hearts of them all,  
and considers all their deeds.

A: Yes, the Lord's eyes are on those who fear him,  
who hope in his merciful love,  
to rescue their soul from death,  
to keep them alive in famine.

B: Our soul is waiting for the Lord.  
He is our help and our shield.  
In him do our hearts find joy.  
We trust in his holy name.

A: May your merciful love be upon us,  
as we hope in you, O Lord.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil  
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

### Our Hope comes from God

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

*CCC 1817*

He had compassion on us, and mercifully saved us, observing the many errors in which we were entangled, as well as the destruction to which we were exposed, and that we had no hope of salvation except it came to us from Him. For He called us when we were not, and willed that out of nothing we should attain a real existence.

*St Clement*

The good which we ought to hope for from God ... is eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of God Himself. For we should hope from Him for nothing less than Himself.

*St Thomas Aquinas*

Unto those things which are not seen then extend your hope, wait, endure...Fix your hope in God, desire the things eternal, wait for the things eternal.

*St Augustine*

**[See Catechism 1817-1821]**



### **Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina (1)**

Describe what you see. Which exact moment does the artwork capture?

Where does Simeon fix his eyes? Why? How is he holding the child?

The artwork portrays Simeon's hope fulfilled. What could help you grow in hope?

The light in the artwork is on the Christ-Child and comes from Him. How is Christ the light of your life and the source of your hope?

Simeon's Song of Praise (c.1700-1710) by Aert de Gelder