

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Simeon

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 3

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IN BRIEF

Saint Simeon

Just and devout old man of Jerusalem who took the infant Jesus in his arms at the Presentation in the Temple.

Feast day	February 3
Era	1st century

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Simeon

Saint Simeon is the old man of Jerusalem who took the infant Jesus in his arms at the Presentation in the Temple. The Gospel of Luke is the only source that speaks of him, in just a few verses, but those verses have shaped all of Christian prayer: his canticle, the *Nunc dimittis*, has been sung every evening in the Liturgy of the Hours for centuries. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on February 3, the day after the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Who was Saint Simeon?

Saint Luke introduces him in a single sentence: a man "just and devout," who was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and upon whom the Holy Spirit rested. The Spirit had revealed to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

The Gospel gives neither his age, nor his occupation, nor his family. Christian tradition has always pictured him as an old man, which his own words suggest, since he asks God to "let him go in peace." On the other hand, nothing indicates that he was a priest of the Temple: Luke presents him as an ordinary believer, guided by the Spirit.

He bore a common name in the Judaism of his time, that of Simeon, one of the sons of Jacob. Many English Bibles and hymns spell it "Simeon," while some older texts use "Symeon." In the Eastern Churches he is called Simeon the God-Receiver (*Theodochos*), "the one who received God."

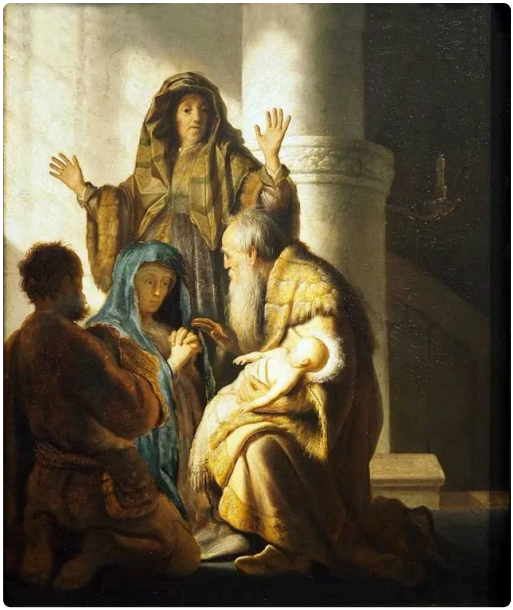
Key dates

- **Before the birth of Jesus**: The Holy Spirit reveals to Simeon that he will not see death before he has seen the Lord's Messiah.

- **Forty days after the Nativity**: Moved by the Spirit, he comes to the Temple as Mary and Joseph present the child Jesus.
- **The Presentation**: He takes the child in his arms and sings the Nunc dimittis, proclaiming a light for all nations.
- **The Presentation**: He tells Mary that her son will be a sign of contradiction and that a sword will pierce her soul.
- **1377-1380**: A silver-gilt shrine is made in Zadar, Croatia, for the body that local tradition attributes to him, commissioned for Queen Elizabeth of Hungary.
- **Today**: The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on February 3, and the Church sings his canticle every evening at Compline.

What the Gospel tells us

- **The Presentation**: forty days after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph bring him to the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the law of Moses concerning the firstborn, with the offering of the poor, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.
- **The encounter**: moved by the Spirit, Simeon comes into the Temple at that very moment, takes the child in his arms and blesses God.
- **The canticle**: he proclaims that his eyes have seen salvation, "a light to the revelation of the Gentiles."
- **The prophecy**: he blesses the parents and tells Mary that the child will be "a sign which shall be contradicted," and that a sword will pierce her own soul.
- **Anna the prophetess**: immediately afterward, an elderly woman, Anna, praises God in turn and speaks of the child to all who are waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-38).



Simeon in the Temple, by Rembrandt.

The *Nunc dimittis*, the Church's night prayer

Simeon's words are called, after their first Latin words, the *Nunc dimittis* ("Now you dismiss"). With Mary's *Magnificat* and Zechariah's *Benedictus*, it is one of the three great canticles of the Gospel of the infancy of Jesus.

The Latin Church sings it at Compline, or Night Prayer, the prayer that closes the day before sleep. The choice speaks for itself: whoever goes to bed entrusts the night to God, as Simeon entrusted his death to him, in the peace of one who has seen what he was waiting for. English-speaking Christians also know it well through choral Evensong, where the *Nunc dimittis* has been sung for centuries in cathedrals and college chapels.

The canticle also says something new: salvation is prepared "before the face of all peoples," and not for Israel alone. In a story deeply rooted in the Temple and the Law, it is one of the first announcements that the Gospel will be

opened to all nations.



Simeon the God-Receiver, by Alexei Egorov.

Candlemas and the "sign of contradiction"

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord, on February 2, is popularly called Candlemas, the feast of candles. The candles blessed and carried in procession that day echo Simeon's words about the "light to the revelation of the Gentiles." In the East, the feast is called the "Meeting": the meeting of God with his people, represented by the two elderly figures, Simeon and Anna.

Simeon's second saying, darker, announces the Passion. The sword that will pierce Mary's soul has become the first of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin in Catholic devotion. Simeon is thus the first, in the Gospel, to join the joy of the Savior's coming with the announcement of the cross.

Key moments

- **Before the birth of Jesus**: the Holy Spirit reveals to Simeon that he will not die before seeing the Messiah.
- **Forty days after Christmas**: he meets Mary, Joseph and the child in the Temple of Jerusalem.
- **The same day**: he sings the *Nunc dimittis* and announces to Mary the sword of sorrow.
- **1377-1380**: a silver-gilt shrine is made in Zadar, Croatia, for the body that local tradition attributes to him, commissioned for Queen Elizabeth of Hungary.
- **Today**: the Church commemorates him on February 3 and sings his canticle every evening.

Why is Saint Simeon invoked by the elderly and the dying?

Simeon is not the official patron of a profession, but Christians naturally turn to him in certain situations. He is the saint of faithful waiting. He did nothing spectacular: he hoped all his life, he stayed attentive to the Spirit, and he was able to recognize the Savior in a little child carried by a humble couple.

That is why people pray to him for the elderly, for those approaching death and for all whose hope is tested by a long wait. His words, "Now you let your servant go in peace," have become a prayer for a peaceful death, and many say them at the bedside of a dying loved one.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Simeon in art

Simeon is almost always shown as an old man with a white beard, holding the infant Jesus in his arms, often with his eyes raised to heaven. He usually appears in scenes of the Presentation in the Temple, alongside Mary, Joseph and the prophetess Anna, sometimes with the two turtledoves of the offering.

Rembrandt painted the scene several times, bathing the old man and the child in light. In Eastern icons of the Meeting, he bends forward to receive Christ with covered hands, a sign of reverence.

Where to pray to Saint Simeon

- **Zadar, Croatia**: the church of Saint Simeon, where a fourteenth-century silver shrine contains the body that local tradition attributes to him.
- **Everywhere**: in every church where the Presentation of the Lord is celebrated on February 2, and every evening in the prayer of Compline.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Simeon, with the text of the *Nunc dimittis*, or the novena to Saint Simeon.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Simeon and the Nunc Dimittis

The prayer of Saint Simeon is one of the oldest and most often prayed in the Church: his canticle, the *Nunc dimittis*, is sung every evening at Compline (Night Prayer). You will find it below with its source, followed by an original prayer to Saint Simeon by Saintspedia.

The Canticle of Simeon (*Nunc dimittis*)

> *"Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace; because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."*

Source: Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 29-32, Douay-Rheims translation (public domain). In the Liturgy of the Hours, this canticle is said at Night Prayer and followed by the Glory Be. Anglicans know it in the Book of Common Prayer form, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," sung at Evensong.

> *"Behold this child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted."*

Source: Luke 2:34, same translation. These are the words Simeon spoke to Mary just after his canticle.



Saint Simeon blessing God, with the child in his arms.

Original prayer to Saint Simeon

Saint Simeon, you waited all your life for the consolation of your people: teach me the patience of hope. When the waiting seems too long and God's promises seem slow to come, keep my heart awake.

You came to the Temple moved by the Holy Spirit: make me attentive to his quiet promptings, so that I may recognize the Lord wherever he shows himself, in the simplicity of a child or of a poor person.

You held the Savior in your arms: obtain for me the grace to receive him with the same joy in prayer and in the Eucharist.

I entrust to you the elderly, the sick and those who will soon leave this world: may they, like you, depart in peace. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

And when my evening comes, help me to place my life in the Father's hands, saying with you: my eyes have seen your salvation. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray to Saint Simeon

The Roman Martyrology commemorates Saint Simeon on February 3, the day after the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple (February 2, Candlemas). His canticle can be said every evening before going to bed. It is also a beautiful prayer:

- at the bedside of a dying person, or for a loved one who has just died;
- for grandparents and the elderly, especially those living alone;
- during a long wait for healing, work, a child or a vocation;
- at the end of a day, to entrust the night to God.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Simeon or pray the novena to Saint Simeon. His shrine is in the church of Saint Simeon in Zadar, Croatia, which keeps a silver-gilt reliquary made between 1377 and 1380.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Simeon

This novena to Saint Simeon is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days, it follows the few verses of the Gospel of Luke that speak of the old man who held the infant Jesus in his arms. It is a novena of hope, for the elderly, for the sick, for those who are waiting, and for a peaceful death. To end on February 3, the day the Church commemorates him, begin it on January 26. It then passes through Candlemas, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, on February 2.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment, ideally in the evening, since Simeon's canticle is the Church's night prayer. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. You may end each day with the *Nunc dimittis* and the small act proposed. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: A just and devout man

Luke describes Simeon in a few words: "just and devout." He was not famous, not a priest, not a leader. His holiness was hidden in an ordinary life of faithfulness to God's law and of prayer. That is a path open to everyone.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, help me to live an ordinary life with extraordinary faithfulness, in prayer and in justice toward others. Amen.

Today: Do one ordinary task with special care, offering it to God.

Day 2: Waiting for the consolation of Israel

Simeon lived in expectation. He did not give up on God's promise, even when the years went by. Many of us are waiting for something: healing, a reconciliation, a job, a child. Simeon teaches us to wait without bitterness.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, keep my hope alive in times of waiting, and protect me from discouragement. Amen.

Today: Name before God, honestly, what you are waiting for.

Day 3: The Holy Spirit was upon him

The Spirit rested on Simeon, spoke to him and led him to the Temple at the right moment. Simeon's life was attentive and docile. The Spirit also speaks to us, often quietly, through a thought, a word of Scripture, an encounter.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, through the intercession of Saint Simeon, make me attentive to your quiet promptings. Amen.

Today: Pray the "Come, Holy Spirit" before an important decision or conversation.

Day 4: Recognizing God in a little child

Many people passed through the Temple that day. Only Simeon and Anna recognized the Messiah in the child of a poor couple who could offer only two birds. God often comes in small and humble ways that are easy to overlook.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, open my eyes to recognize Christ in the little ones, the poor and the forgotten. Amen.

Today: Give your full attention to someone who is often overlooked.

Day 5: Holding the Savior in his arms

Simeon took the child in his arms. After a lifetime of waiting, he held God himself. In the Eucharist, we too receive the Lord. Simeon invites us to receive him with the same wonder and gratitude.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, help me to receive Jesus in Holy Communion with love and wonder. Amen.

Today: Go to Mass if you can, or make a spiritual communion.

Day 6: A light for all nations

Simeon announced that the child would be "a light to the revelation of the Gentiles." Salvation is not reserved for a few: it is offered to all peoples. On Candlemas, the Church blesses candles to remind us that we are called to carry that light.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, make me a bearer of Christ's light for those around me, and pray for missionaries. Amen.

Today: Light a candle at home and pray for someone far from God.

Day 7: A sword will pierce your soul

Simeon also spoke to Mary of sorrow: a sword would pierce her soul. The joy of the Savior's coming already carried the shadow of the cross. Mary kept these words in her heart. She accompanies all who suffer.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, with Mary, Mother of Sorrows, pray for all who are suffering today, and help me to carry my cross with faith. Amen.

Today: Visit, call or write to someone who is going through a time of sorrow.

Day 8: Simeon and Anna, two elders

The Gospel places two elderly people at the heart of this scene: Simeon and the prophetess Anna. Old age is not uselessness: it can be a time of prayer, wisdom and witness. Our grandparents and elders are a treasure for the Church.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, pray for grandparents and the elderly, especially those who are alone or forgotten. Amen.

Today: Spend time with an elderly person, or call a grandparent.

Day 9: Depart in peace

"Now you dismiss your servant in peace." Simeon was ready to die, because he had seen what he was waiting for. The Church sings his words every evening, so that each night may be a small rehearsal of the final trust we will place in God.

Prayer: Saint Simeon, pray for the dying, and obtain for me the grace of a peaceful death, my eyes fixed on Jesus. Amen.

Today: Pray the *Nunc dimittis* before going to sleep, entrusting your night to God.

Closing prayer

> *Lord God, you fulfilled the hope of Saint Simeon by letting him hold your Son in his arms. Through his intercession, keep our hope alive, make us attentive to your Spirit, and grant that, at the end of our life, we may depart in peace, having seen your salvation. Hear also the intention I have entrusted to you during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Simeon and the prayer to Saint Simeon, with the full text of the *Nunc dimittis*.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint Simeon in Zadar and the Shrine of Saint Simeon

In Zadar, on the Dalmatian coast of Croatia, the Church of Saint Simeon keeps above its high altar a great silver-gilt shrine, a masterpiece of medieval metalwork. It holds the body that local tradition venerates as that of the old man Simeon, who received the child Jesus in his arms in the Temple of Jerusalem. It is the chief place of pilgrimage dedicated to this saint of the Gospel.

A body from the East

The Gospel says nothing of Simeon's death or burial. The relics venerated in Zadar arrived in the city in the Middle Ages; tradition says they were brought from the East by a merchant. As with many relics of biblical figures, their authenticity cannot be established by history. They do, however, testify to an ancient and continuous devotion: for centuries, the people of Zadar have considered Saint Simeon one of their protectors.

Queen Elizabeth's silver shrine

The present shrine was commissioned in the late 14th century by Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary and Croatia, wife of King Louis I, and made between 1377 and 1380 by the goldsmith Francesco da Milano, who was settled in Zadar. Covered with reliefs, it depicts in particular the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, episodes from the life of the city and miracles attributed to the saint. On the lid, an effigy of the old man lies at rest. The shrine is one of the most remarkable pieces of medieval metalwork in Croatia.

Visiting and praying on site

The church is in the old town of Zadar, a short walk from the other monuments of the peninsula. Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Simeon. Before the shrine, it is natural to say the Canticle of Simeon, the *Nunc dimittis*, and then to entrust to the saint an elderly or sick person. You will find the text of the canticle and a prayer in the prayer to Saint Simeon. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places associated with Saint Simeon

- **Jerusalem**: the Temple Mount, setting of the Presentation of Jesus, of which only the Herodian foundations and the Western Wall remain.
- **All over the world**: the churches where the Presentation of the Lord is celebrated on February 2, with the Candlemas procession of candles.

Practical information

Zadar can be reached by road, by air and, in season, by boat from Italy. The Church of Saint Simeon is a parish church: opening and Mass times vary by season and celebrations. Proper dress is required. Ask the Archdiocese of Zadar or the city's tourist office before you come.

Credits and sources

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