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Wilkau-Hasslau, in Advent 2023

Dear friends,

We greet you warmly in this Advent season with this picture of our old Jewish brother Shim'on. The Bible tells us that he was one of those who carried a living hope in their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. It must have been so strong that the Father in heaven gave Shim'on a personal promise, namely *„that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah of the Lord.“* (Luke 2:26)

And now he has been drawn into the temple by the Spirit of God and the carved figure captures the joy and bliss of this moment in which Shim'on is allowed to hold the baby Jesus, who is only a few days old, in his arms. His whole life comes to fulfillment for him at this moment. Shim'on, whose name means *„(God) has heard“*, praises Israel's God with a deep sigh from the depths of his heart: *„Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation“* (Luke 2:29-30)

Schim'on and this picture have been with us for two years. Unfortunately, we don't know who the artist is who captured this moment so aptly. The depiction touches the deep longing in our hearts for an ever-new encounter with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It touches our waiting for His coming and the day when we will be with Him and as intimately united with Him as both in the picture.

We cordially invite you to pause for a moment and join us in this togetherness between you and Jesus. What touches you when you look at the picture? Where do you feel a longing for such a deep encounter? What do you associate with the idea of the moment when the Advent of this world is fulfilled and we see salvation?

Shim'on's view goes beyond this personal level. He recognizes in the baby the hope of Israel, the promised Messiah. He continues: *„My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all peoples: a light for revelation to the nations and for the glory of your people Israel.“* (Luke 2:30-32)

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The year that lies behind us both had a lot to do with the people of Israel. We went to Auschwitz three times to worship the Messiah there. We had a special time of encounter with Him in Jerusalem with the worship group on the Mount of Olives. There the Father also deepened the call to be a part of the world-wide Isaiah 62 prayer initiative in May, inviting and leading in prayer. As we write these lines to you, we are in a daily prayer chain because of Hamas' barbaric attack on Israel. We have had several opportunities to speak to churches about Israel and God's plans for them. In Advent last year, I, Martin, started the times of worship in Niederwiera, the „cradle of German Christians“. I have been at the altar of the small village church week after week for a year now.

With the baby Jesus in his arms, Shim'on had an eye for the significance of this Son of Man for the nations and for the Jewish people. He understood that with Jesus, the Father would fulfill the promise given in Isaiah 42. There it says about the Messiah: „*I will keep you and make you the covenant of the people, the light of the nations*“ (Isaiah 42:6). Shim'on was able to say in faith what we see being fulfilled today. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob begins to awaken His people and lead them into the glory of their destiny: „*Your salvation ... prepared ... for the glory of your people Israel.*“ (Luke 2:30-32)

„Glory“ in God's word is connected with God himself. It is connected with the unique beauty and transformative power of the suffering Messiah Jesus on the cross. Concerning Him, it expresses excellence, preeminence, His dignity, and grace as well as His majesty. In the Old Testament, „glory“ is also associated with the weight and importance of a person, and their exercise of a God-given destiny.

Israel will become even more involved in all of this. While the darkness is increasingly openly opposing these people, threatening it and denying it their right to exist, the Jewish people will become more and more a reference to their God and a touchstone that reveals the hearts of every person and of the nations as a whole. The Jewish people fill this place today in its suffering and in the future, awakened by the Spirit, as the „*head of the nations*“ (Jer 31:7).

Together with you, we are waiting for it this Advent. Like Shim'on in the picture, we can close our eyes, focus our hearts on Jesus and recognize in His Spirit what is beginning to come true today. And with the help of each one of you from our circle of friends, whose prayers, donations, and solidarity have once again enabled us to fulfill our mission this year, we can take our place in this event of God. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

**God is waiting for people who worship Him. God's heart beats for reconciliation, who He is and what He does should be recognized. God loves to be the God of His people Israel.** We are allowed to pass this on with our lives first and foremost, but also with our songs, our prayers, and all our preaching services and travels. We have been able to tell you about many of these things over the course of the year. We are infinitely grateful to our Father in heaven for all the provision, all the guidance, and every seed that He has planted in our hearts and the hearts of those who have been able to hear His message! Together with you, we are on this journey.

With best wishes for a Christmas full of light and a blessed New Year, we remain sincerely connected to you, yours

Wal + Saes