



## In Peace and Joy I Now Depart

**Text: Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

**Tune: Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

When Martin Luther wrote hymns for occasions or to paraphrase texts, he did more than simply put a Biblical text into a metrical version to pair it with music. He expanded the text and described its meaning and comfort, putting that explanation onto the lips of the singer. So as he wrote “In Peace and Joy I Now Depart” for the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord and the Purification of the Virgin Mary, he expounded what St. Simeon’s announcement means for the Christian. Luther, by means of St. Simeon, explains that, for the Christian, death is nothing to fear. Rather, “death is but a slumber.” In a preface to death and burial hymns, Luther wrote: “But we Christians, who have been redeemed from [eternal death and the wrath of God] by the dear Blood of the Son of God, should by faith train and accustom ourselves to despise death and to regard it as a deep, strong, and sweet sleep, to regard the coffin as nothing but paradise and the bosom of our Lord Christ, and the grave as nothing but a soft couch or sofa, which it really is in the sight of God; for he says, John 11:11, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep,” and Matthew 9:24, “The girl is not dead but sleeping” (AE 53:326). May this be our confession regarding death as our own approaches!



Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483 at Eisleben to Hans and Maragete, née Ziegler. After receiving extensive training in law, he entered the Augustinian Convent at Erfurt after making a promise to do so if he were kept safe in a thunderstorm. He was ordained in 1507 and subsequently became a lecturer at the University of Wittenberg. In 1512 he received his Doctor of Theology degree. After further study and discussion

with fellow monks he became disheartened by abuses he saw in the Church of his day. On October 31, 1517 he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg to begin a discussion about the abuses. After the Theses and several other writings, Luther was considered an outlaw and enemy of the Church, and his life was in danger. Wishing to protect him, several friends put him in hiding in Wartburg, where he began his translation of the Bible into German. In 1522 he returned to Wittenberg and began the work of settling the turmoil which had arisen. By 1523 he started writing hymns. By 1524 Luther oversaw the publication of the first Lutheran hymnal, the *Achtliederbuch* (literally *eight song book*), containing four of Luther’s hymns, three by Paul Speratus, and one by an unknown author (likely Justus Jonas). Later that same year, the *Enchiridion* was published in Erfurt, containing twenty-five hymns, eighteen of which were written by Luther (a total which included “In Peace and Joy I Now Depart”). Luther continued to write throughout his life, writing both hymns and theological works. He died February 18, 1546 in his hometown of Eisleben.

Though Luther wrote “In Peace and Joy I Now Depart” as a hymn for the Feast of the Presentation, it quickly became a favorite for funerals because of its bold confession of the Life that awaits the Christian after earthly death. From shortly after its writing the following Collect, written by Luther, appeared at the bottom of every printing of the hymn: “Almighty eternal God, we heartily pray Thee, grant that we may know and praise Thy dear Son as did St. Simeon, who took Him up in his arms and spiritually knew and confessed Him; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord. Amen” (AE 53:132).

Since Lutherans have attached Simeon’s song to Holy Communion, using it as a post-distribution canticle, it is appropriate to consider what this means in light of the Lord’s Supper. When we sing with St. Simeon, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,” we are confessing that we are ready to die because we have come face-to-face with Jesus Christ, God’s Salvation. We have received everything we need, in Word and the Sacrament, to enter into eternal life. May this song always be on our lips as we await eternity with Jesus Christ, our true Joy, Reward, and Glory.