



# **The Feast of Presenting the Lord Christ in the Temple**

**According to Saint Jacob of Serugh**

**Preparation and Commentary  
Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

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Translation

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## **Joyful Biblical Encounters**

In 2004, I asked some children in one of our churches in the United States, "How did Simeon the Elder know that Jesus was the Christ that the fathers and prophets were waiting for in the Old Testament?" One child answered, "He must have seen a vision that revealed this truth to him."

Here we began to discuss: What was this vision? Were his eyes opened to see the angels and heavenly hosts hasten from the Holy of Holies towards the child that Saint Mary was carrying, who bowed down in awe with joy and cheer for His coming? Or perhaps he saw the angels preaching Him as they did on Christ's Nativity when they preached the shepherds? Or maybe he saw Hades shaking and the people of God filled with gladness, urging Him to come and break their chains and bring them into Paradise?

Either way, his eyes were opened somehow to see what those in the temple had not seen at the time.

### **It is the feast of the open eyes that see God's wondrous salvation!**

One of the children said, "Inevitably, when Saint Mary entered the temple carrying the Child Jesus, the old Simeon saw the angel of the temple cheering and praising the Lord. He hastened towards the child and the rest of the angels that were all over the temple hurried together in a joyful procession to worship the Child, celebrating their Lord's entry into His house! How happy was Simeon the elder who was expecting the coming of a child, born of a virgin as the saying of Isaiah the Prophet: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

## What were the feelings of Simeon the elder?

Simeon the elder experienced three feelings that shook all of his depths, so his heart cried out:

- ❖ **Welcome to Your temple, O You who fills Heaven and Earth!** Behold, the angels together with all the saints of the Old Testament rejoice at Your entry into the temple!
- ❖ **Welcome to my heart Your new home,** which has been sanctified by your Holy Spirit.
- ❖ **When will I depart to Your heavenly house,** my eternal home, when I shall find everyone welcoming me saying, *'Welcome home!'*

That is why Simeon took Him in his arms, 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 which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:28-32)

## What did Simeon the elder see?

The eyes of Simeon the Elder were opened, and he saw the Savior.

He did not notice the temple in all its beauty but saw the Lord of Heavens.

He saw the angels with the heavenly hosts awaiting His coming.

He saw Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the holy fathers rejoicing!

He became like a dreamer who has been freed from the captivity of blindness and realized what he had not known all the days of his life.

He cried to the Savior, saying: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation.”

## **What does the Child Jesus say to those who refuse to meet Him?**

The Child Jesus says to the one who refuses to meet Him and does not follow the example of Simeon the elder:

My son, why do you deprive yourself from seeing me? Why do you close your eyes from me?

Why are your eyes full of planks and mud? Ask, in a spirit of repentance, that you may meet me.

Carry Me in your arms as Simeon the elder carried me, for I desire for you never to leave my arms.

Behold, my virgin mother brought me to Simeon the elder and she longs to introduce me to you.

The desire of my heart is to place my hands on your eyes so that they may be opened, just as the eyes of Simeon the Elder were opened.

You will enjoy grace for grace and new secrets will be revealed to you every day.

You will obtain glory for glory and freely set off to my heavens!

With Simeon the elder, you will see the heavenly hosts joyfully prostrating before me.

Then your heart will be filled with heavenly joy and inexpressible happiness, and your life will be transformed into an uninterrupted feast.

The feast of my entrance into the temple becomes your eternal feast that fills your whole being with my exalted grace.

## **The receiver of sacrifices offers the sacrifice of the poor**

Indeed, the sight of Simeon the elder carrying the Child Jesus astonished all the servants of the temple, the priests, the Levites, and those people visiting the temple, as they were wondering in themselves and among themselves saying:

*“For decades, we wondered and asked ourselves, Simeon’s age was extended for many years, incomparable to anyone else in our time. He is more than 200 years old, why? What is his message at this old age? He completely lost his sight or at least partially! Is he happy? Why does he not complain about his old age? He became very old so does this count as a gift from God? What is expected of his old age?”*

They were surprised by this old man, who hastened to receive a newborn baby carried by His mother. They did not realize that this infant is truly, not only ancient of days, but also eternal in His divinity; He is the Creator of time! He is the incarnate Word of God!

They did not realize that this old man, whom none of his contemporaries witnessed the day he joined the temple’s service, carried the great heavenly High Priest who offers forgiveness to the sons of Levi while being a small child and a baby. Paul the apostle said later about Him: *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:15-16)

*“So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son Today I have begotten You.” As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek”; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,”* (Hebrews 5:5-10)

All the priests of the temple and the Levites present were surprised by this encounter between Simeon the elder and the infant, and that Joseph, the poor carpenter, offered two pigeons for the birth of this Child. They did not know that this Child was the One who ordained the law with its various sacrifices and rituals (Leviticus 1-7).

- ❖ The Ancient of Days whom Mary wrapped in swaddling clothes, and the aged Simeon held in his arms without being weakened.



The High priest who gave atonement by the sons of Levi, was being offered in the holy temple with the young doves.

On behalf of the Lord of all sacrifices, who with His Sender accepts sacrifices, Joseph brought two young birds.

He gave the Law to Moses on mount Sinai together with His Father and He came to fulfill in His own person the order that He himself taught.

He came to circumcision so that no one might deny His humanity. And He brought the offering so that He might show that He was not a stranger.

Mary carried the One who receives all, together with His offering, so that according to the law He should bring the offering to the holy temple.

Joseph carried the young birds which he brought on account of the child and he went up the sanctuary to offer according to the law.<sup>1</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Simeon the elder testifies of the Incarnate Son**

Simeon grew old and the whole generation that witnessed his birth died, so that those who witnessed the entry of the child to the temple might wonder and those seeking the divine salvation would search for the divine promises and learn of the divine incarnation.

- ❖ It was right too that the old man should bear witness concerning that Elder who became a child at the end of the times.

He lengthened and prolonged for him the life by extending the measure of his years, so that with his testimony he should proclaim his faith that He is the Son.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, trans. Thomas Kollamparampil, CMI. Rome: (Centre for Indian and Interreligious Studies, and Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997), FH V.



Death was altogether forbidden to approach him, so that due to that reason the governing of the Son might be made manifest.

His bond in life was prolonged for a long life and he was allowed to stay, so that when he made supplication to the Son to release him, the world should perceive.

Generations have passed away but the aged one stays in prolonged life in order to be a witness to the Lord of times in his prolonged life.

Generations fell asleep while the vigilant Simeon still waited for the First of the generations who came to carnal birth.

The old man sat by the road of the world and gazed out to see when the Lord of the world would come as He promised.

Death passed by on either side, but it did not touch him,

Again causing many generations to pass on ahead of him, without ever approaching him.<sup>2</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **God is Him to takes away Simeon's life**

- ❖ Simeon was a stone placed on the road of the One who comes and He who rolls it away from among the living, is the Vivifier of the dead.

A great knot was tied among the living in a divine fashion so that whosoever comes and is able to untie it would be truly God.

Although there were many anointed ones and priests, Simeon stayed on to distinguish from them the True One who is his Lord.

This sign was placed for that True One, namely, that One, the Lord of all times, who would give him rest from his old age.

He was bound in life and suspended on hope against death for, once it was apparent who would release him, that one would be the Messiah.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V.

The old man grew weary gazing on every babe (to see) who is the one who would give him rest from the toil and the burden (of age).

And when this expectation was placed before his eyes the time had arrived for his old age to come to rest.

The Guide of all came to untie his ship in the face of death, for it had been moored in the harbour of life until (that Guide) should come.<sup>3</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **The Spirit calls on Simeon to go to the temple**

- ❖ The young girl carried the Ancient of the generations who became a babe, who came to renew what is old by His birth.

He ascended, according to custom, to bring sacrifices, as you have heard and the Spirit called out to the aged Simeon, "Come and receive Him !"

The Lord who loosens the bonds has arrived, come, seek from Him, because He will release you as He promised, for He has the authority.

Rise up, O aged one, receive consummation from the Giver.

Behold, O labourer of the sacrifices, the High Priest has come to give you rest.<sup>4</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Truth Forces Simeon to Tell the Facts**

Simeon the elder became a wonderful example for the believers. Indeed, they here on earth enjoy a taste of heaven, but they say with Paul the apostle: "For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. 1:23). The apostle was unable to choose, if the matter were placed in his hands, would he live amid persecutions and tribulations testifying to the Lord Christ, or would he want to depart and encounter the Lord face to face? Thus, the Apostle was struggling to make a

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<sup>3</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V.

choice, not between two evil things, for neither of which was good and the other evil, but between two choices that are ultimately good, that is, between enjoying the blessing of struggling for the kingdom of God, and his inner longing to see God in heaven. In either case, he will be in Christ. He was choosing between temporary struggle and another in which there is permanent rest, but both are for the glory of God.

- ❖ Here he shows that the present life is also needed, if we use it as it is meant to be, to bear fruit, since, if it is unfruitful, it is no longer life. For we despise those trees which bear no fruit, as though they were dry, and give them up to the fire. Life itself belongs to that middle class of indifferent things, while to live well or ill is in ourselves. We do not then hate life, for we may live well too. So even if we use it ill, we do not even then cast the blame on it ..... And wherefore? Because not itself, but the free choice of those who use it ill is to blame. For God has made you alive, that you may live for Him. But you, by living through corruption unto sin, make yourself accountable for all blame. <sup>5</sup>

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ By the spirit with which he was clothed Simeon was moved towards the child and the truth compelled him to speak true matters.

He had seen the virgin who carried Him, and he forded his hands.  
With trembling he adored and received Him affectionately from her.

He began to intercede with Him, "Release me henceforth, for I have seen you my Lord.

Behold, I have received you; henceforth, let me go towards  
consummation.

Behold, my eyes have seen your great mercy as you promised.

Set me free and let me be at rest on the earth until the resurrection.

I was looking for you to let loose my bondage by your birth, grant  
consummation to the burden (of my age) that I beseech you.

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<sup>5</sup> Homilies on Philippians, homily 3.

There had been an agreement between you and your Father and the Holy Spirit that death should not come upon me until I should see you.

Behold, the agreement which came about in a mysterious manner is consummated.

Now, command death to grant me rest according to your promise.

Until now you have confined me here in the world, so that I might see you; release me to go out now because I have become worthy to see your birth.

Behold your gesture gave me the sentence long ago, that I should be bound until you have come in the body.

Behold, the sentence itself has been completed; release the bound-one; because I have seen you, now is the time for me to take rest: it is for this that I have waited.

Let the wind of death henceforth blow upon my limbs that I may go and reach the haven of rest, so that I may wait for you.

As One who commands all, sprinkle death upon my burden (of old age),\_and set me free, the aged one, to descend to dwell in the bosom of Sheol.

Send me and set me in the deposit among the dead until you come and take me on the day of resurrection.

Command the soil to take a little rest upon the grains of its dust and with many you shall rouse it at the end of the time.

I have watched very much on the highway of the world to wait for you, allow me to sleep and at the resurrection you may call me.

Sow me in Sheol with many who are scattered in it and when the winter of the-world has abated, command me to spring up.

Place me beneath in the furrow of the earth and close the door and  
when you pour forth the rain of the (latter) end, I shall sprout by it."<sup>6</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The Mystery of Simeon's Plea to the Child Jesus**

Saint Jacob feels that those who were in the temple were astonished at the sight of this old man that all the citizens of Jerusalem were talking about because of his unique old age, as he rushed towards a forty-day old child, and in fear he carried Him and pleaded before Him. Saint Jacob wonders what this prestigious old man asks of a small baby?!

❖ O aged Simeon, what is it you say about the child?

For these are words with which one might talk to someone aged.

Behold, you make supplication to the infant affectionately,

You are old and advanced in age, and why then is this?

It is (but) forty days since the young girl Mary gave birth to Him

And how is it that He hears what you are saying in His infant state?

Or is that word of yours not to be understood, as you say?

Or does the whole of your story seek another meaning?

Or is your old age younger than that of the infant?

Or is the child's age higher than that of yours?

Or does His duration surpass your old age?

Or has time itself taken its beginning from Him?

Why do you say to the (child) of swaddling clothes, 'Release me from the world'?

Is it revealed that He is the Lord of the world, as you are asking Him?

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<sup>6</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V

The supplication of the old man bears because in witness to the Son indeed, because in a mystical manner His name has existed before the sun

That supplication of the old man in the presence of the child would reveal the story of the Son of God, how He is from eternity

“Before Abraham came into being I AM.” Therefore it is proper that Simeon made supplication to the One who was (already) in existence.

Then to the One who was able to release him henceforth he was pleading, “Release me” and he did not doubt Him who was being carried in swaddling clothes.

He carries Him in his hands and believes in Him that He is upon the chariot.

He is held in the hands as a child and Simeon seeks release from Him.

He is revealed in His humanity, but he did not doubt His exaltedness. He is carried by him in the palm of his hands, yet he believed in Him that He is the Lord of the heights.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Simeon wonders about offering the sacrifice on behalf of the One who accepts sacrifices with His Father**

Those around the old man who was pleading to the little baby were asking themselves: “What is this old man asking of this baby?” Then the elder also, when he met the wonderful child, was astonished that the Creator of the world had humbled Himself and was incarnate to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the world, and now He is asked to offer two pigeons, because the child’s family is too poor. Will a sacrifice be offered on behalf of the Holy One who accepts the sacrifices offered in the temple to sanctify the people across the generations? The elder stood perplexed about how two pigeons were offered on behalf of the Messiah who will offer Himself as a sacrifice on the cross for the sake of Adam and Eve and for the sake of their offspring until the day He will come on the clouds!

- ❖ He saw the young birds that were brought for the sacrifice according to the law, and the old man was moved to speak about the child.

Then such words as these were spoken by the aged one, "To whom shall I offer the sacrifice you, the lord of the heights, have brought?

Sacrifices and libations ascend to you in the presence of your Father and how shall I receive a sacrifice from you and to whom shall I offer?

For the Father does not receive anything without you.

Behold, from eternity, it is through you that He accepts all offerings.

Holiness is conferred upon the priests and to their sacrifices by you and it is through you the priests of sacrifices receive their hallowings.

You are the one who sanctifies the sacrificial offerings together with your Begetter.

It is through you that the Levites' offerings are sanctified.

The perfect sacrifices were offered to you because you are from eternity. And your Father granted propitiation to the ancient sacrifices through you.

It is to you Abel constructed the altar and offered his sacrifices.

In your name he brought the first-born ones of his flocks and their fatlings.

The offering of virtuous Noah too was offered to you; while you received it, the matter concerning you was hidden in your concealed Father.

Melchizedek put on your great image with his offerings, and spiritually he had depicted your priesthood through his sacrifices.

Abraham built the altar at the top of the mountain for you, and your symbol redeemed the child, Isaac, from the knife.

It was to you that Jacob had made the vow when he was fleeing and after you had assisted him, he gave to you all his tithes.



Through your hand holiness descended to the Levites and to you they have brought all the produce of their tithes.

There is no (time) when the Father is without you. and He received all sacrifices through you and with you.

Then You are the recipient together with your Begetter, and therefore, how shall I accept from you the ritual sacrifice which you offer?

If I receive it, I shall be giving (back) that same to you.

Take from your own and it is appropriate for you to accept.

You have brought the sacrifice; come, receive it together with your Begetter.

Give me what you have brought and receive from me what I am offering.

Your Father, on His own, does not receive sacrifices from anyone.

Behold, you are there with your Sender because He is with you.

Behold, I am holding the two young birds that Joseph brought.

To whom should I offer if I do not offer through you to your Father ?"

Wonder seized the aged Simeon as he saw the Son.

Then the righteous one was reduced to marvel on account of Him.

A lump of earth carried in its hands the Sea and it embraced it [the sea]. The depth of the Sea was collected in the cupped hands of dust, but it is not dissolved.

The Flood is placed in the hands of the aged one, but it does not sweep them away, and by the fingers of soil the Lord of the seas is carried.

A straw solemnly carried the Flame, but it is not burned up.

The Coal of Fire is placed on antique wood but it [the coal of Fire] did not consume it [the wood].

The aged one carried the lion's Cub and embraced it.

Yet the might of that Powerful One did not terrify him.

Simeon became a cherub of flesh on account of Jesus and instead of wheels, he carried Him solemnly in his hands.

He was filled with the Spirit and understood hidden things, and he was not ashamed to make petition to the Son affectionately:

"Release me that I may go to [be at] rest a little among the dead, because your way is wearing, and I am too old for the journey."

You have to enter into a great battle on the way which you have set out on and an aged man is not suitable for you to go with you.

You arouse dispute to raise up the side of righteousness, and young men are suitable for the way of your proclamation.

You have a battle with the mighty one who humiliated Adam, but I who am aged am not able to take up arms.

You want to pull down the high fortifications that error has built up.

Look for young people, to go with You because I am grown feeble,

You have the four regions to subjugate by Your crucifixion,

And You will need healthy feet are needed to run with You.

You have a new work to do on (throughout) the whole earth.

Have pity upon my old age, I am not capable of all Your tasks.

You are devising (how) to build up the downfallen world.

But I am aged, I am too weak for your building work.

Your way is of slaughter and your face is set in the direction of death.

Let me go in peace, let my old age be not sprinkled with blood.

The path that You have set begets suffering to those who travel along it,

Give rest to me and then you can pass on to your task.

You seek to be smitten by the captors in your bodily state,

I shall take rest, for my power to endure is weak.

You have the captivity of the peoples to turn away from stumbling-blocks.

Take away with You valiant men, but I have become aged.

The whole road of Your proclamation is sprinkled with blood,

And because I have become old, I am not able to walk along it.

Your Labour is lengthy, and I am too weighed down by labour,

And because I make supplication you do not pass me but release me.

With this deep feeling , Simeon was entreating the Son to release him,

To be at rest on earth on account of the burden of his old age.

He takes hold of the child and entreats Him without flinching.

He carries Him in his hands and makes supplication to Him as unto the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **The Virgin Mary marvels at Simeon's words**

After Saint Jacob of Serugh talked about the confusion of all those around the old man and the marvelous child, and also about the elder's confusion of how the sacrifice of the poor is offered on behalf of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, he begins to search for what Saint Mary was thinking about when all these things were going on around her. Perhaps, she wondered within herself: "What should I say to this elder? O old man, tell me, how will this baby release you? When did you meet Him for Him to bind you? Where did you see Him? You are an old man, and He is a baby! When did He make the agreement with you that you should speak to Him? Since when did you have a secret privately with Him, for this story which you are speaking is like an old one?

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V

❖ Mary marvelled discerningly at these things,  
 And with all kinds of thoughts she was contemplating in wonder.  
 And perhaps she had told Simeon directly,  
 “How will the Child release you, old man, and when did He bind you?  
 How was it seen by you, for you are old and He is an infant?  
 And at what time did He make the agreement with you that you should  
 speak to Him?  
 Behold, since when did you have a secret with Him,  
 For this story which you are speaking is like an old one!  
 This discourse of yours seems to me not to be of this day,  
 Because you speak to Him as though for a long time you had seen the  
 Child. Your story is hidden and behold, it seems to me that He is from  
 eternity,  
 But my Son is an infant and how does He know what you are saying?  
 On earth was He seen by you or in heaven? Disclose and explain to me.  
 From the time I gave birth to Him, He has not met you except today.  
 I am not convinced of this story which you tell, because I am a girl, and  
 you are old and advanced in age.  
 And if I myself was not aware of what you are saying, when and how  
 would the Child I brought forth know this?  
 How are you seeking release from Him and when did He bind you?  
 It seems that for a long time, as you say, you have been bound.  
 On which day has the small young Child bound you,  
 And how can He release you now as you are pleading with Him?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V

### **Simeon's Response to Mary's questions**

❖ Simeon says: "He is Almighty for eternity and it is easy for Him.

And He is more exalted than you; you shall learn from Him how He is.

Eve your mother is immensely younger than He, for he is the One who governs all times and their ordering.

Behold, by the hands of your Son, the creation came into existence long before,

And He was with his Father when He was making the walls of the universe.<sup>9</sup>

St. Jacob of Serugh

### **Mary invites Simeon to explain the tidings of this Child to Saint Joseph and to non-believers**

Saint Jacob of Serugh envisions the Virgin Mary inviting Simeon the elder who took a divine promise to see the Virgin's child and was keen to know Him, to explain the story of this child to Saint Joseph and to the non-believers.

❖ Mary speaks to the righteous Simeon: "Convince, Joseph for truly I am convinced of these (matters).

He taught me the whole of His story by an angel, and as you are saying, I am understanding without doubt

From the messenger who brought His good tidings I have heard them,

And there is no reason to doubt about your supplication.

How is there a room for a stumbling block to dwell in me,

Because behold, I have given birth to a child, yet I am a virgin?

It is fair for you to be an advocate among unbelievers.

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<sup>9</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V

Raise your voice, let all hear what you are saying...

Speak, Simeon to the Jews and do not be afraid.

And reprove them, as how much they have accused me on account of your Lord.

Begin on the road of the apostolate clearly and following your footsteps the generations will go following the luminous One.<sup>10</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Simeon's supplication to be an intercessor and a witness among the dead**

Saint Jacob of Serugh highlights how much Simeon was longing to go tell those who had fallen asleep on hope, that the Messiah came and the time of their departure with Him to paradise is approaching.

- ❖ He was saying to Him: "Release me, henceforth, because I have seen You, my Lord, so that I may rest in Sheol until You shall come in Your splendour.

Release me from life that I may descend to proclaim among the dead

The good hope to the hopeless, from your revelation.

There I shall narrate to Eve regarding your birth,

'Your daughter has given birth to an aged infant who will redeem you shall visit them in their tombs, if I am able, and I shall sprinkle them with the story of your birth, that they may rejoice in it.

The prophets and kings who were yearning for You shall marvel at me.

All of them calling me to be blessed because I became worthy to see You.

O Son of God, who gladdened Simeon by His birth make us all rejoice in the good hope of faith in You.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob of Serugh. Select Festal Homilies, FH V

My son, why do you deprive yourself from seeing me?  
Why do you close your eyes from me?  
Carry Me in your arms as Simeon the elder carried me,  
for I desire for you never to leave my arms.  
Behold, my virgin mother brought me to Simeon  
the elder and she longs to introduce me to you.  
Then your heart will be filled  
with heavenly joy and inexpressible happiness,  
and your life will be transformed into an uninterrupted feast.  
The feast of my entrance into the temple  
shall become your eternal feast  
that fills your whole being with my exalted grace.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

