



Remarks by Revd. Dr. Sam Wells at Mary Semans Memorial, January 30, 2012

### Greeting

Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans was born when Duke University was no more than a twinkle in her great uncle's eye. But Mary's been a twinkle in the eye of this university ever since – and not just this university, but this city, this state, and beyond. And we've gathered today because she put a twinkle in our eye too. We've come together to hand her over to God, that she might be a twinkle in God's eye forever. Let us pray.

Loving God, you see the twinkle in our eye, and you see the tears. As you gave us the joy and the companionship of life with Mary, give us now the courage and the hope to live without her. As you gave us abundant life through her life, give her abundant life through yours, that she may be the apple of your eye, and abide in your everlasting arms, now and always. Amen.

### Gospel Introduction

I'm going to read about two people, who both, like Mary, were well on in years, who both symbolized their people, and who had both spent their lives longing for the redemption of their society. The story tells how they rejoiced to see salvation in the shape of a tiny baby. I believe we can see Mary's life through the window of theirs.

### Gospel

The gospel is taken from Luke chapter two.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when Mary and Joseph brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

### Reflection

Simeon says to God, "My eyes have seen your salvation." We're here today because Mary Semans was an agent of God's salvation; because she was a woman who helped us see salvation, in education, in art, in civil rights, in medicine, in horticulture, in music. Because of Mary Semans, each one of us can say, better than we otherwise could have, "My eyes have seen your salvation." We celebrate that. What a wonderful thing to be able to say.

But that's not the real reason why we're here. The real reason we're here is because of something else Simeon says, this time to Jesus' mother Mary. Simeon says, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." The real reason we're here today is because Mary Semans was a sword that pierced our souls. Pierced our souls with her kindness. Pierced our souls with her wisdom. Pierced our souls with her honesty. Pierced our souls with her courage. Pierced our souls with her fierce, indomitable, irrepressible, enduring spirit. Pierced our souls with her love.

Thank you, Lord God, for the gift of Mary Semans. She showed us your salvation. And she pierced our souls with love.