

## **Sermon – Sunday, February 2, 2020**

### **Luke 2:22-40**

#### **Jesus Is Presented in the Temple**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’

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 the parents 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 for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped 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.

#### **The Return to Nazareth**

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

## Sermon – Feb 2, 2020 – Presentation of Christ – St James

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple.

“God is among us.” We celebrate the incarnation... God is with us; God becomes human. Christ crawled into ordinary life and invites us today, to meet Him there.

Ancient Jewish law required that, following the birth of a firstborn male child, the mother must go to the temple after 40 days for her purification and for presentation of the child to the Lord.

Luke’s Gospel tells us that there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. He was righteous and devout and the **Holy Spirit** rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the **Holy Spirit** that before he died, he would see the Lord’s promised Messiah; the Messiah whom they had been awaiting for a very long time. This Messiah would save his people. One day, **Guided by the Spirit**, Simeon came into the temple; and when the Mary and Joseph brought in the child Jesus, Simeon was stirred within. He took the baby in his arms – he realized that this was **the** one and he praised God.

first image please



GIOTTO di Bondone  
(b. 1267, Vespignano, d. 1337, Firenze)

Here is Giotto's work called 'Christ's presentation at the temple'. Looking at the image, you will see that Mary stands across from Simeon and Anna, arms outstretched. She has just released her son to the old man whose "song" identifies the child publicly as the promised one for the first time. Perhaps she is torn; perhaps she longs to retrieve him and press him to the safety of her mother's embrace. This reminds us that all mothers must release their children sooner or later to the care of others and of God.

The child in this painting is surprisingly large, more a child than an infant. He looks back at his mother. Is the separation taking its toll on him as well?

A young woman kneels at Simeon's feet, her arms outstretched, positioned similarly to many depictions of Mary Magdalene. Her gesture of adoration suggests she recognizes what this moment means.

Next we see another interpretation of ‘The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple’, this one by Rembrandt.

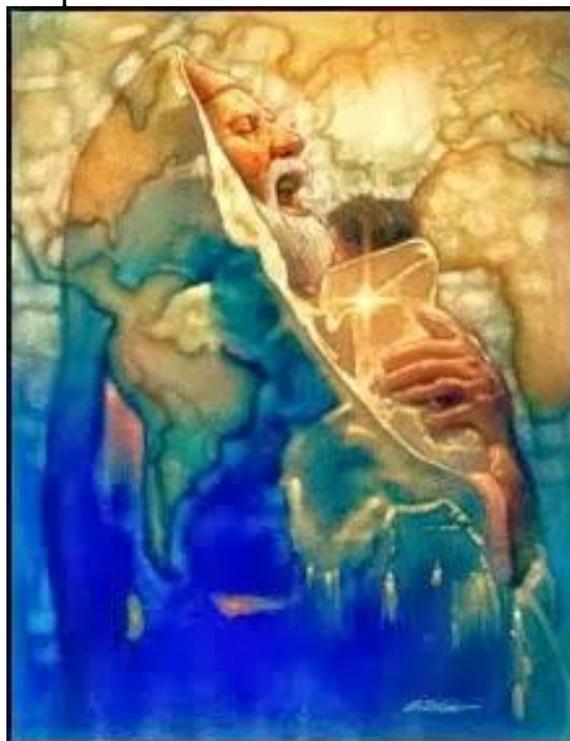


Rembrandt painted this scene three times. This, the first, done in 1628 is dramatic: five figures are clustered in a golden light that falls from the high window in the temple wall. Anna, the prophetess, stands behind Mary and Joseph who kneel before Simeon as he holds the child in his arm. Both Anna's arms are raised perhaps in amazement.

Simeon is talking intensely with the parents, leaning toward them as if to persuade them of something. Mary's face is shadowed so it is difficult to interpret her expression. Joseph's back is to the viewer but his posture shows he is fully

involved in the conversation. The child is the most disengaged figure; held somewhat offhandedly by Simeon as one who often holds babies while engaged in other work. The humanity of the painting strongly contrasts with others that emphasize the divine character of the moment. The light that bathes the Christ child, suggests, as Rembrandt often does, divine presence.

Next is a very different depiction of Simeon.



Simeon's manner toward the child is anything but offhand. Here there is great joy! Simeon clasps the tiny bundle to him and seems ecstatic! He has waited many many years for this. Out of the darkness, the light has finally come.

Simeon's words on seeing the Christ child, now a famous canticle, known as The Song of Simeon, also called the 'Nunc Dimittis' Latin for it's first words '...now you are dismissing your servant in peace. The Song of Simeon is part of the service of Evening Prayer in our Book of Common Prayer and so is familiar to many. We sometimes sing or say it at the end of funerals.

‘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.’

Simeon was guided by the Holy Spirit that day. He boldly declared that this Jesus would be ‘a light for revelation to the Gentiles’. We are told that the Spirit rested on Simeon. In that time it was unusual for the Spirit to rest ‘with’ an individual. The Spirit of the Lord God of Israel was thought to reside in the ‘Holy of the holies’, the inner sanctum within the Temple in Jerusalem. But with the coming of Christ, the incarnation, the taking on of flesh of our Lord, the activity of the Spirit intensifies and appears amongst the people.. Mary is overcome and conceives by the power of the Holy Spirit and here Simeon is also overcome by Spirit. He didn’t know why he went into the temple that day. ‘Something’ told him to go. And something told him this was the child he had been awaiting for so long. This was the special One. There is mystery, there is wonder. Simeon and Anna were mystics. They had special knowledge which enabled them to see the extraordinary in an ordinary day. They realized in the baby, God in the flesh.

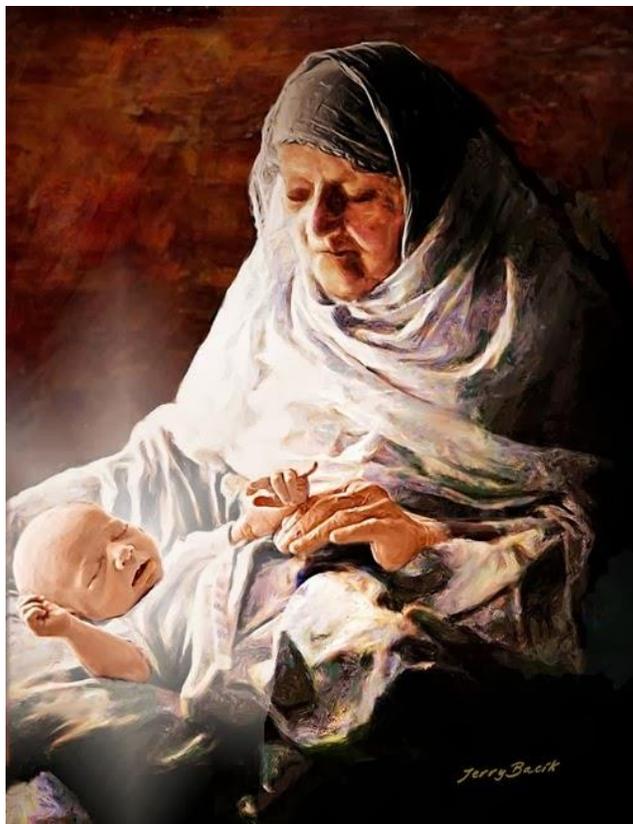
We don’t know much about Anna but we do know she is a great age, 84. She is a widow and never leaves the temple. She spends all her time fasting and praying. But Luke’s Gospel says that right away, at the moment she came on the scene, Anna began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel.

Here is one interpretation of Anna by Louis Glassman, who was an American artist.



This is quite different! You might want to check out some of his other work... paintings of Bible personalities. Someone thought this Anna might have a bit of a temper! What do you think? She is pulling a Hebrew prayer shawl over her head. Does she have small smile on her lips? Is she preparing to give God big prayer thanks for the child she recognizes as the redeemer? She is colourful and adorned with silver bracelets and coins.

Here is another depiction of Anna by Canadian artist Terry Black.



Anna here seems thoughtful; gazing at the small child...both bathed in light. Maybe she is asking God's blessing on him, what do you think?



Here is another Rembrandt depiction of Anna. This time a weathered face. And another. Just to think about.



Mary and Joseph come to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law. The elderly prophets Simeon and Anna also keep the tradition; but this salvation will need to reach beyond the tradition if it is to be a light to the Gentiles, if it is to be universal.

Luke suggests Simeon and Anna have a skill given by the Spirit: they can see the light, the divine, in the poor and insignificant, emerging like tiny green shoots –the first fruits of God’s Reign of justice and peace.

Simeon and Anna were mystics. They saw what others were not seeing, not even Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:33). They saw a light (Luke 2:32), but one that must first come through the darkness of opposition (Luke 2:34), and through Mary’s pierced heart (Luke 2:35). Let us be Simeon; let us be Anna on this day we commemorate Jesus being presented in the temple and every day people are presented to us, strangers out of darkness. Let us see the light in each other. Because of the darkness that shadows so many of us, we are afraid to look. We can be brave.

Each of us can be open to the Spirit in ourselves and around us. Like Simeon and Anna, let us also be open to what the Spirit is saying and doing, so that we might notice our Lord’s healing activity in our ordinary lives. Right now, the days are lengthening. The light is coming. Christ is with us. Right now, where are the tiny green shoots, the new possibilities, God presenting to us to bring about justice and redemption? Amen.

It is as simple as this: two strangers enter the same room, at the same time, from opposite doors. Eyes lock from afar. And the world is never the same.

On this Candlemas Eve, where do we find ourselves in this story? Are we Mary, graced by the light that another sheds on our path? Or are we Brigid, carrying the light for another in need?

## Presentation of Jesus in the Temple – Year A

Malachi 3:1-4; Psalm 2:22-40; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

“When you hear a boy ask why the sun comes and goes, tell him because there is no light without the dark.” – Mago de Oz

Jesus is only eight days old, and the old people, Simeon and Anna, see darkness and light, light piercing the dark. Psychologist Carl Jung would jump up for joy that his theory of synchronicity is proven true. Why are all these people converging at just this right moment? Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, and baby Jesus. Carl Jung says that synchronicity is never accidental. It is a force of basic reality stuff that brings things and people together for meaning. He does not say what that stuff is. But Luke does. He tells us that the Holy Spirit guided Simeon (Luke 2:27). Simeon and Anna were mystics. They saw what others were not seeing, not even Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:33). They saw a light (Luke 2:32), but one that must first come through the darkness of opposition (Luke 2:34), and through Mary’s pierced heart (Luke 2:35). It is not only the Spanish music group Mago de Oz that knows there is no light without the dark. We too. Let us be Simeon; let us be Anna; let us be Mago de Oz. On this day we commemorate Jesus being presented in the temple. But every day people are presented to us, strangers out of darkness. Let us see the light in each other. Because of the darkness that shadows so many of us, we are afraid to look. We can be brave. It is as simple as this: two strangers enter the same room, at the same time, from opposite doors. Eyes lock from afar. And the world is never the same.

Keeping Faith and Breaking Ground. The sacrificial context and the elderly prophets represent a keeping of the tradition; but this salvation will also need to reach beyond the tradition if it is to be a light to the Gentiles, if it is to be universal.

The contemporary example I used to 'flesh' this theme out is one many congregations are currently facing: how do we remain rooted in the tradition while trying to reach out to the younger generations, especially in our worship and music? Change in our century has happened so rapidly that each generation effectively has its own new culture, even within the same racial and ethnic boundaries. Congregations can be segregated racially and ethnically these days and still find themselves facing a crisis of a "generational multi-culturalism," if I may coin that term.

Either congregations intentionally face this newly accentuated problem of integrating the generations, or they begin to segregate along generational lines, as well. Unfortunately, many congregations already find themselves in the situation of having all the young people leave. On the other hand, many newer congregations, which cater to the younger generations, find themselves with few senior members, and little sense of the tradition. But the Gospel does mean to be universal, to offer salvation to all people, so how do we keep the faith and break new ground in ways that reach out across all the cultural barriers?

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

By meditating on the human life of Jesus Christ, God become human for us, we discover that our lives have a purpose and a goal, summed up in the newborn boy child, Jesus. If you want to see what our God is like, look into the manger.

Incarnation means, taking flesh, and by taking flesh, Christ crawled into ordinary life and invites us to meet Him there.

The stately architecture and stylized figures (twelve, besides the Christ child) make the painting at first glance seem static, but like so many of Giotto's imaging's of Christ's life it pays due and surprising attention to the high human drama of those moments when God touches and blesses humankind through human obedience.

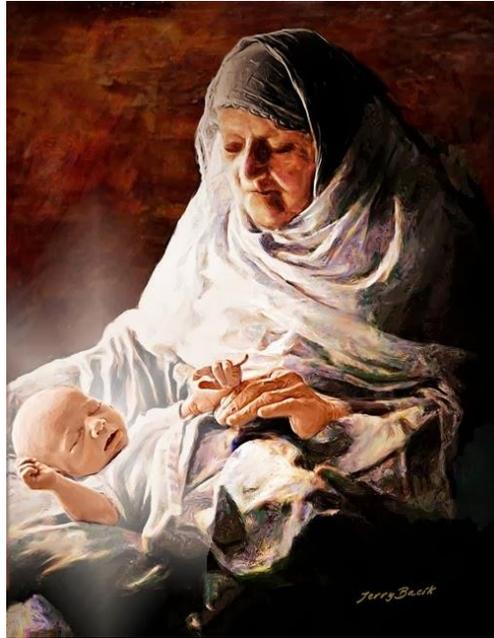
According to the book of Luke, [Simeon](#) was a devout [Jew](#) who had been promised by the [Holy Ghost](#) that he would not die until he had seen the [Saviour](#). When [Mary](#) and [Joseph](#) brought the baby [Jesus](#) to the [Temple in Jerusalem](#) for the [ceremony of consecration of the firstborn son](#) (not the circumcision, but

rather after the time of [Mary's purification](#): at least 40 days after the birth), Simeon was there, and he took Jesus into his arms and uttered words rendered variously as follows.



*Simeon's Song of Praise* by [Aert de Gelder](#), around 1700–1710.

So Luke stresses that we cannot enjoy the light and warmth of Christ without also welcoming the purification that it brings, a cleansing of the inner clutter of insecurity, lack of focus, deceitfulness, culling favor, and so on. This inner "Imbolc" must be undertaken (and the coming Lent will give us the opportunity) in order for the Light to do its work in us and our communities.



Luke also suggests that Simeon and Anna have a specific skill given by the Spirit: to be able to see the light of the world in the poor and insignificant, already emerging like tiny green shoots –the first fruits of God’s Reign of justice and peace.