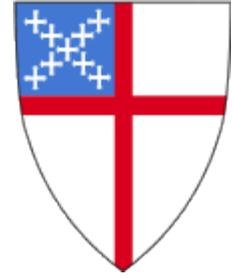


The Lessons Appointed for Use on
the Feast of

The Presentation of Our Lord

February 2, 2020
RCL



- [Malachi 3:1-4](#)
- [Hebrews 2:14-18](#)
- [Luke 2:22-40](#)
- [Psalm 84](#)

Preface of the Epiphany

Today we recall the presentation of our Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem, forty days after his birth. This is also the day Mary undergoes the purification rite after giving birth. The little family came to the temple as they are required to do, to present their first-born son to God, “to be designated as Holy to the Lord.” In Luke’s Gospel, the presentation and the purification are a single ritual, giving a symbol of the fulfillment of God’s promise. Jesus, circumcised on the 7th day after his birth, was brought to the Temple with his mother who was to be purified after giving birth. Mothers were considered ritually unclean until they underwent purification rituals on the fortieth day.

Simeon and Anna, prophets who reside in the Temple and have been awaiting the arrival of this special child their entire lives, both recognize Him as Israel’s salvation. They pronounce their gratitude to God that he has fulfilled His promise,

not just to them, but to Israel. It must have amazed Mary and Joseph. There were so many things that had gone on around the birth of this baby. Certainly, they must have found it difficult to think of him as ordinary.

The psalmist foretells how Jesus loved the dwelling place of God – the temple. How those who dwell in the house of the Lord find joy in being close to God, living under his protection. Mary and Joseph knew those psalms as well as we know our favorite hymns. They couldn't have known that one day they, and their son, would be considered the subject of these prophetic words.

Keep in mind that when they returned twelve years later, Jesus feels right at home at the temple. And he amazes the scholars of his day with his questions. For those of us who are in academia, it is the students that ask the thought provoking questions that impress. Questions more than anything else demonstrate understanding.

As this story unfolds, the baby Jesus's very being demonstrates his divinity. Prophets, wise men, shepherds all recognize this baby as someone very special. Simeon feels he can die happy now, he has seen the promise of the Lord fulfilled in this baby – the salvation of all Simeon knows and loves. Anna has lived in the

confines of the temple most of her adult life. She lived a remarkably long life. And she, like Simeon, proclaimed this baby as being the salvation of Israel.

One might expect that they would be looking for a baby from a prominent family, with riches and education. Or maybe politically prominent. But we know that because only two little birds as considered an adequate offering for Mary's purification that this was a couple of little means. They were the commonly faithful, fulfilling their duty under Mosaic Law just like anyone else. The price was not just determined by the ritual requirements, it was what we might call a sliding scale, based on the ability of the couple to pay.

And yet, two of the more well-known prophets in the temple, made proclamations of incredible power when they took this baby into their arms. Simeon, a "righteous and devout" man, held the child in his arms and proclaimed that Jesus would be "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles.*"

What might those who knew Simeon and Anna thought? We can see that Mary and Joseph were surprised by their words.

Luckily, or rather miraculously, these statements of Jesus power were either overlooked or ignored by the chief priests, otherwise Herod would have been informed long before the arrival of the Magi of his arrival. I wonder if all the time

the hearts of Mary and Joseph were filled with amazement, and maybe just a little pride, they must have been filled with fear as well. This was a time to raise as little attention as one could in the presence of the Romans, and those who supported them in the Jewish community.

Christians have celebrated Jesus presentation at the temple with candlelit procession, proclaiming the coming of this child of light. It is timed as the last feast day of the church year that is timed following Christmas.

Did you know that this is also where the beginnings of ground hog's day began? Today is called Candlemas, and it is a time when we bless all the candles of the church, and some you may bring from home because it is when we can see the harbinger of spring. It was long thought that bears and other hibernating animals came out of their dens just long enough to check out the weather, and then they predicted the coming of warmer, spring weather sooner, or later. Just like our friend Punxsutawney Phil, the ground hog from Pennsylvania, bears and other critters would emerge, and if the day was cloudy or stormy winter was ready to break, and warmer weather is coming soon. If clear weather, then spring is delayed.

As we think about the changing of the seasons, it also brings to mind patience as we await the coming of spring. Anna and Simeon waited their whole lives for the coming of Christ. There are others whose examples we recall, Noah waited patiently for the floods to recede, Sarah and Abraham waited until old age for the fulfillment of the promise of God of a child, Jacob waited to marry Rachel. In our lives, we wait for results of medical tests, for college acceptance letters, for responses to job applications, for tax refunds, and we await the coming of Christ. In all the instances of waiting, it can be a time to learn, to appreciate the present. New things will happen while we wait. Our needs and priorities may change while we wait. And just like Anna and Simeon, we need to be alert in our waiting. Watchful for the new good thing that may be the fruition of God's promise. In the words of Simeon:

"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."