

# ***THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD***

*Malachi 3:1-4; Psalm 84; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40*

Today we celebrate one of the principal feasts of the church.

The strange thing is that many will never have heard of it. The Feast of the Presentation occurs each year on February 2nd, exactly 40 days after Christmas. Most years the feast slips by us on a weekday, with perhaps a celebration scattered here and there. This year, however, February 2nd falls on a Sunday, and this great feast takes precedence over what would otherwise be the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany.

The full name of today's feast is the Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple. It's a celebration of one of Jesus' major life events; that's what makes it a principal feast.

We may also have heard of it as "Candlemas" or "the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary." "Candlemas" because this is the feast when candles are traditionally blessed. In some places, today marks the end of the Christmas season, which is not observed as 12 days of Christmas, but 40 days of the Incarnation. And "Purification of Mary" because the law of Moses required that she, like the infant Jesus, participate in a rite of purification 40 days after childbirth.

That's the why of the event: Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, bringing along with them a pair of turtledoves to offer as a sacrifice.

But what happens at the Temple is nothing short of miraculous.

Two prophets encounter Jesus and understand there is

something special about him.

First, there's Simeon. Simeon, we are told, was righteous and devout. And he had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Messiah. You can imagine his plight. The older he got, the more he likely asked, "Is *this* the one?" of every person he encountered. "Is today the day?"

And the answer must have been "No, not today" a thousand times over. But on this day, he takes the infant Jesus into his arms and sings:

*"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace  
according to thy word.  
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,  
which thou hast prepared  
before the face of all people;  
to be a light to lighten the Gentiles  
and to be the glory of thy people Israel."*

It is, of course, a text well known to Anglicans as one of the usual two canticles at Evensong in The Book of Common Prayer. And it is also a prophecy. Simeon says, basically: Today I have seen my salvation, my Lord, my Saviour. And this God has made this revelation for the glory of his people. We are told that Mary and Joseph were amazed. Jesus was not yet six weeks old. They had survived encounters with angels, shepherds praising God, wise ones from the east bearing gifts, and dreams that caused them to escape into Egypt.

And yet they must've wondered. Could they have said to themselves, "Do they really mean *our* child?" or even "Do these people really mean *any child* can be the Saviour of humankind?" And then there's another prophet, Anna. We are told she had

lived eighty-four years, no easy feat in first-century Palestine, especially for a woman! She prayed and fasted in the Temple night and day. But on this day, she noticed that something was different. She finds Mary and Joseph and the baby and begins to tell about him. “Praise be to God,” she may have said, “for this truly *is* the Redeemer of the world.”

So we have a story about waiting, a story about watching, and a story about discovery. Waiting for the day to come, for the Saviour to appear, for all things to be put right. Watching to see that the day *has* come, that *this* child is destined for the falling and rising of many. And the discovery that God has revealed all this to us: this light that lightens all the world, this child who redeems all people, this Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

Like the prophet Simeon, we yearn for the coming of the Messiah, for all in this world to be put right: for the hungry to be fed, for prisoners to be set free, for the sick to be healed. Like the prophet Anna, we hope that our prayer and sacrifice and faithfulness will be fulfilled: that equality will come for all God’s people, that peace will prevail over the whole earth, that justice will conquer all oppression.

And so, we believe. We believe because we are tired of waiting.

We believe because we are weary of watching. And we believe because we have discovered the truth. The hard truth of Christmas, of Candlemas, of the Purification, of the Presentation: the hard truth of the Incarnation is, in the words of Howard Thurman, simply this:

*“After the prophets have spoken,  
When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,*

*When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among people,  
To make music in the heart.”  
Let us work, pray and give to make it so.*

**AMEN.**