

February 2, 2020
The Presentation of the Lord
Luke 2:22-40

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord," and to offer the sacrifice of "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons," in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of 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 favor of God was upon him.

Background:

Luke presents Joseph and Mary as faithful observant Jews. In the first verses of his gospel, he tells his community that Joseph and Mary went to Nazareth to be enrolled to fulfill the decree of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-5). Just as they are faithful to fulfill the command of the civil authorities, they are also faithful to fulfill their religious requirements of purification. In the text here, Luke states five times that Joseph and Mary are acting to fulfill the law (Verses 22, 23, 24, 27, and 39).

The Jews believed that blood contained the life-power and was sacred and belonged to God. Therefore, it was kept separated. When that separation was breached, the people and the object that came in contact with the blood needed to undergo a ritual of purification. The processes of birth and death especially became the focus of many purification practices. The second belief within the Jewish tradition was that the firstborn son belonged to God. Therefore, an offering was made to God as a way to acknowledge God's claim on the child.

In the text, Joseph and Mary took Jesus with them to the temple, to make the necessary offerings in fulfillment of requirements that were associated with these two beliefs. While they were there, they encountered Simeon and Anna. This encounter probably took place in an outer courtyard of the temple, where women would have been permitted. By addressing Mary, Simeon was acting out of character for men of the day, who would never have addressed unfamiliar women in public. Both Simeon and Anna are described as people who had spent much of their lives waiting for the day of fulfillment. They were the ones who recognized the divine presence within the infant Jesus. While it is not directly stated, it is implied that the religious officials who would have been about the temple area did not recognize God's presence within the child.

Also within the text there is a subtle comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist. John's birth is hailed by one prophet, his father Zachariah, while Jesus is greeted by both Simeon and Anna. Also Simeon points to the universality of Jesus' mission, "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." (Luke 23:29-32)

Reflection Questions:

1. Was it important for your parents to maintain religious traditions as you were growing up? How does that affect you now?
2. What kind of sacrifice would it have been for Mary and Joseph to travel to Jerusalem, go to the temple, and purchase two pigeons? What does that tell you about them?
3. What are some areas of your life where those who raised you made sacrifices?
4. Both Simeon and Anna are presented as people who have made long and personal commitments to be in the temple. Why does Luke make sure that he includes them in his record of Joseph and Mary coming to the temple for the purification ritual?
5. Can you take some time to talk with God about the sacrifices your parents made as you were growing up, what you have learned from the sacrifices you have made in your own life, or some other thoughts or feelings that arose within you as you reflected on this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com. Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material is posted on Fridays and is available until the following Friday when the new material is posted. Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced without permission in writing from the copyright owner. *Please include this information when printing or forwarding.*

Excerpts from the readings for February 2, 2020, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Thus says the Lord God: I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; And there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. He is coming. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord. Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord, as in the days of old, as in years gone by.

*Who is this king of glory? It is the Lord! Lift up, O gates, your lintels;
reach up, you ancient portals, that the king of glory may come in!
Who is this king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty in battle.
The Lord of hosts; he is the king of glory.*

Since the children share in blood and flesh, Jesus likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the Devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life. Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people.

Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted --and you yourself a sword will pierce--so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of 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 favor of God was upon him.

Excerpts from Malachi 3:1-4; Psalm 24:7-10; Hebrews 2:14-18; and Luke 2:22-40