

The ~~Other~~ Christians

Feast of the Presentation

Luke 2:21-39

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St. Michael's and All Angels, Lansing

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May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day and remain with us always. Amen. Good morning.

Eight days after he was born, his parent's circumcised him. I imagine it was a bit of shock for the Holy One of God, and I bet he wailed. Holiness, marks of holiness frequently come with a cost of some sort.

They circumcise him and according to their customs, they bring him to the Temple. They will be ritually cleaned and He, in keeping to the laws, will be dedicated to the Lord, as was the custom for first born sons.

I imagine the scene something like this: They enter the busy temple at the Court of the Gentiles. A place where non-Jews could worship God and where sacrificial animals could be purchased. Joseph goes to buy the two turtle doves while Mary holds Jesus and takes in the crowds of this most amazing temple. Then when Joseph returns with the two birds, together they are moving through the faithful to the Court of Women in the eastern part of the temple proper.

It's then as they make their way across the vast hall, that Simeon, an elderly man, a man whose name is taken from the root of the Hebrew word, *Shema*, "hear or listen," ( P65 *The Gospel of Luke: New Cambridge Bible Commentary, 2018.*) Simeon who has been waiting his entire life, to glimpse the Messiah. Simeon who is well known and maybe a bit mocked by the Temple regulars, for publicly holding this wild idea that God's Holy Messiah would one day be made known to him. Simeon sees them, sees Jesus, and his soul brightens. Across the room he sees Jesus, Mary and Joseph, across the room he sees, and he believes, then reaching out his arms and asking to cradle their little one, when Simeon holds, he knows.

And he says, something beautiful along the lines of, "Now my soul can rest in peace, for mine eyes have seen the glory of the Lord, a light to enlighten the nations, and a glory for your people Israel."

I can see Mary and Joseph standing there, trying to grasp what it might mean to be players in the world of God's salvation history, "*a light to enlighten the nations*". Who are we, that this is happening to us?

Then Simeon looks at Mary, his deep eyes, surrounded by the leathery lines and wrinkles of his somewhat translucent skin, Simeon says to her, *“This boy will be the cause of the falling and rising of many people, he will be a sign that causes opposition, and the inner natures of many will be revealed. And you, a sword will pierce your innermost being.”*

Before Mary and Joseph can recoil, react or even respond, Anna, a prophet, approaches too, an elderly woman who worships God with fasting and prayer, begins there and then to praise God, and announce to all that this little one will have much to do with the redeeming of Jerusalem.

It’s safe to presume, that neither Anna, Simeon, Joseph, Mary or Jesus were the same after that trip to the temple. They were all accosted by holiness.

Friends we are in a tumultuous world. The first two weeks of this presidential administration have left some of us elated, most of us confused and more than a few of us filled with despair.

I find myself, gorging on news or sitting stoically in a corner, neither or which is terribly helpful.

In reflecting on our world and who and how we are as people who wish to follow Jesus, I want to invite us to double down on our spiritual practices. Simeon and Anna, only saw Jesus, they encountered the Holy because of their regular practice of worship and prayer. I’m not limiting God’s holy presence to temples, synagogues, and churches, for that would be a patently false assertion. But I am longing for us to gather in our sanctuaries so that we can cease to be alone together.

I’m not beckoning us to prayer instead of action, I’m not inviting us to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the myopic, chaotic, seemingly self-centered, cessation of civility. Instead, I am calling us to who and why we exist. We are people of faith, longing to follow God, in the person of Jesus the Christ. We are people who know each other because we have found each other in our desire to encounter the Holy. We have discovered each other in our pews as we seek to worship God. I want us to do that. To pray to God, to worship God, and in doing so remember that we are not alone. I want us to pray, to offer and receive the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, confessing and anointing, in marrying, burying, confirming and ordaining. I want us to pray and receive the sacraments so that together we may be filled, nurtured, comforted and enlivened, ready to use our gifts to answer God’s call, for a world of mercy, compassion, care and welcome. I want us to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest scripture so that we may know how peoples of the past have heard and answered God’s call.

I want us to live our lives, bravely, fearfully, beautifully and awkwardly, always inviting and reaching out to any of us who feels excluded, scared, hunted, or somehow unworthy or unloved. I want us to be the OTHER Christians, the ones who will love you, as you are, and as God is Creating you to be. I want us to be the Episcopal church. A church that will never ever apologize for asking anyone for mercy, compassion and prayer.

This is my hope, this is my longing.

In Christ’s Name I pray.