

Epiphany 5A
Grace Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL
February 5, 2023

Is 58:1-2
Psalm 112
I Cor 2:1-16
Matt 5:11-20
(Lk 2:22-40)

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Just a few weeks ago I confessed that my Christmas Tree was still up and I told you about a friend of mine who consoled me by saying that the Christmas Season, strictly speaking, doesn't end until Candlemas. Now to be honest with you, I've not paid much attention to this holy day but my friend's observation piqued my interest. Candlemas is forty days after Christmas Day. It is also known as the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Jewish law called for the presentation of the firstborn son at the Temple forty days after he was born. Forty days after December 25th is February 2nd, last Thursday. This Feast has been celebrated in the Church since the mid-300's, though not so much in Lutheran congregations. The Gospel reading appointed for Candlemas is one that appears only one other time in the lectionary, on the First Sunday of Christmas. It is a very tender and yet moving story about two people we don't hear much about in the Scriptures but I am fond of them. Anna and Simeon. Hear this account that we read from the Gospel of St. Luke.

[Luke 2:22-40]

Anna and Simeon. Two people who were not young. Two people who didn't seem to have family, at least not close by. Two people who spent a lot of time at the Temple. Two people who loved God and had been given a measure of understanding and wisdom. Two people committed to righteousness, devotion, prayer and fasting, worship. Two people. Not famous heroes of the church, in fact they seldom make it even into Sunday School lessons. But in my estimation they are giants in faith.

Luke's account is important because it shows us the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph in complying with Jewish custom and tradition. They were not renegades disregarding Torah, nor would their son abolish the Law. No, they lived in fulfillment of the Law. So to the Temple they came for the simple rites of purification and presentation. And Simeon, having been prepared by the Holy Spirit, sees Jesus, takes him in his arms, and praises God. His hymn lives on in the church today. "Now Lord, I am ready. My life is full. I have seen your salvation, a light of revelation for all people."

And then comes Anna who was 84 years old, widowed after only 7 years of marriage. Persistently at the Temple, day in and day out. For all intents and purposes it was her home. And she too began to praise God and then told his story to all who would hear. And Scripture tells us that Mary and Joseph were amazed at what was happening before their eyes. Mary and Joseph who just a few weeks earlier had given birth, heard the song of the angels, greeted the shepherds,

smelled the animals at the trough, and pondered all that was happening. Now in the Temple with Anna and Simeon.

Anna and Simeon. Salt of the earth people, I think. Don't you? When Jesus preached his Sermon on the Mount, he certainly was not thinking about them but he surely was describing them when he told the crowd and the disciples "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world." Salt and light. Common images. Songs have been sung, poems have been written and pictures have been drawn describing the importance of salt and light.

I want you to notice a couple of things that Jesus says. He said, "You ARE salt; you ARE light." Salt does not try to be saltier. Light does not work hard to shine. Salt simply is. Light simply is. We are. Salt. Light.

Like Simeon and Anna we are beckoned to be who we ARE. – Salt and light because we ARE the baptized people of God. We have been washed and recreated, drawn into relationship with God and with one another. We are marked with the cross of Christ – forever. We are changed forever.

Anna and Simeon were salt and light and they gave witness to Jesus, who is the Light of the world. We are called to the same.

Thanks be to God.