



## **The Feast of the Presentation at Christ Church Cathedral February 1, 2015**

### **Luke 2:22-40**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"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."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by 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.

A woman rancher tells the story of one of her cows giving birth to her first calf. As cows do, she had wandered apart from the rest of the herd to a private and more protected place to give birth. Noticing that the cow was not among the others, the woman rancher began searching for her, finally finding her behind a clump of trees at the edge of the pasture. By the time she had found the cow, the cow was in hard labor. “How would she fare this first time around?” the woman rancher wondered. “Would she make it through the birth easily? Would she bond with her new calf in a way that supported that calf’s survival?”

Within an hour, the baby calf’s front legs appeared followed by its head. Then all at once out came the hips and the back legs, and the new male calf was born. Soon the mother began licking her calf, calling out to it in a low moo, encouraging it to get on its feet and to find its way to her for its all-important first meal—all of which the calf did as the woman rancher looked on.

But then something unexpected began to occur. After feeding her calf for a bit, the cow stepped back, turned toward the woman rancher and nudged her calf forward. She nudged him forward and stepped back as if to present him to the woman rancher and to say: “Here he is. Here he is. Here is an entirely new creature come to earth through me. Here he is for you to see, for you to admire, for you to marvel at.”

I love this story because it fits with what we’re experiencing in nature in terms of a surprisingly early beginning of spring. Nature, herself, it seems, is daily presenting some dimension of itself to us, as if to say: “Here I am. Here I am: a bit of beauty come to earth for you. Here I am for you to see, to admire and to marvel at.”

And so on one of my walks through the West End nature presented to me small but breathtaking snowdrops low against the black, soaked earth, as if to say: “Here I am. Here I am in these little white flecks of beauty come to earth for you. Here I am for you to see, to admire and to marvel at.” The same will be true later in the spring as nature will present to us full branches of blossoms tossed by the rough breezes of early spring above our heads and around us as we walk. “Here I am.” She will say again, “Here are heavy branches of beauty come to earth for you all. Here I am for you to see and admire and marvel at.”

But, of course, these tokens, these images of beauty and of new life, are not the only things that we are presented with in this season.

We, for instance, are presented with images of those weeping at the commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, weeping as they remembered their own and others’ horrific experiences and as they told us that we should always remember what happened there. We are presented with the images of yet one more captive brutally killed by ISIS. And in and around all this, we continue to be presented with images of wars that seem to have no end and strife that seems to have no solution.

And so, if you’re like me, you’re more than a little confused and worried about which of these many presentations of life is the one that is real and true and reliable.

Today is our celebration of The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. This feast finds its origin in a story in the Gospel of Luke in which Mary and Joseph, as new parents, are doing what

any other Jewish parents would need to do forty days after the birth of their son. They are going to the temple to make a sacrifice in order to assure that Mary, as a new mother, can return to her life as a part of the religious community, and they are going to go to the temple to dedicate their son to the service of God. What is important (but not unique) in Luke's account here is that Mary and Joseph are poor—for the sacrifice they bring, is two turtledoves rather than the lamb that a more affluent couple would have brought.

It is within this context, the story of a poor Jewish family simply doing what needed to be done to fulfill the requirements of Jewish law, that something unexpected happens.

No, Mary, herself, doesn't take her son and hold him up in the middle of everyone as if to say: "Here he is: my son, the Holy One of God. Here he is for you to admire." Rather, an old man named Simeon, someone who has been waiting and hoping for what Luke calls "the consolation of Israel," that is, the comfort and liberation of a marginalized and powerless Jewish people, an old man named Simeon, takes the child out of Mary's arms, holds him in his embrace and tells us all who this child is. An old man named Simeon presents to us and to Mary and Joseph what God has actually done. "Here he is" Simeon says. "The Holy One of God who comes as comfort to the sorrowful, as salvation and liberation to those in bondage and as light to those in darkness."

And so while God is perhaps always presenting God's self to us as the extraordinary that is hidden in the ordinary right in front of our eyes, in this presentation, God is showing up as more than just extraordinary. God is being presented to us as the one who comes to comfort the downhearted, to save and liberate those in bondage and to bring light into the darkness that we rightfully fear will overwhelm us and the world.

And, furthermore, what this story seems to be telling us is that it takes one schooled in waiting and watching, it takes one who is longing and in need of comfort, it takes one who yearns for liberation and light not only to recognize what is being presented to us but to take that very one up in his arms.

And so while many of us think of waiting and longing as things we would rather not do, as full of frustration and the potential for disappointment, in this story, at least, this very waiting and longing, is the energy that fuels the reception and the full presentation of God's new and fresh action in and to a world that has grown old with waiting.

And so it is good to wait and watch for the birth of a calf as frightening as it may be to do so. It is good to walk and to look for the signs of spring under our feet and above and around our heads. It is good still to be horrified by what we as human beings have done to each other and what we are still capable of doing, And out of this, it is good to long for a fulfillment that we have not as yet tasted, for a liberation we sometimes believe will never come, for a light we can have a hard time believing in. It is good to strain towards the things that God longs for within us. It is good.

For without this longing, without the ache and the hope that must accompany it, we will not be able to see or embrace the Holy One of God when he comes to us as he always does clothed in the humble and the ordinary and the real. And we will not be able to present him to a world that might easily miss him, but continues to be desperately in need of him.

Where is something small, something humble being held out to you for you to embrace, that will comfort you, that will free you, that will bring you light in what still is a season of darkness? In what way are you being asked or even urged to take this thing in our arms and in doing so hold it for all the world to see? Where in this Cathedral community is the something small, something humble being offered to us as comfort, liberation and light? What might it look like for us to take this something in our arms and to declare aloud the gift that it is to us?

People of God, no matter what age you are, be Simeon, be Anna, be those whose waiting and longing and aching prepares the way for the presentation of the Holy One in and to the world. Be hungry, be hopeful, be watchful, for, look, here he is: coming to us in the place we did not expect him, in the arms of his peasant mother. Here he is, for us to hold to ourselves and then to lift up to a world who has waited and hoped and longed for his coming. Here he is for all to see, for all to admire, for all to marvel at, for all to adore.