

31 January 2021

Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Collect

Lord Jesus Christ, light of the nations and glory of Israel: make your home among us, and present us pure and holy to your heavenly Father, your God, and our God.

Gospel Luke 2.22-40

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons".

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Reflection Taken from Nick Fawcett's book *No Ordinary Man*

The meditation of Mary, mother of Jesus

I had mixed feelings, to tell the truth, not just before the birth but afterwards too.

Does that surprise you? It did me. I thought I'd be ecstatic once the child was born, over the moon – isn't that how we mums are meant to feel?

He was my firstborn after all, a beautiful bouncing boy, so why wasn't I bursting with happiness? Well, I was, of course, part of me anyway, yet there was so much I didn't understand, and so many things to take the edge off the moment.

There was Joseph for a start.

Oh, he was supportive – don't think I'm complaining – once he got over the shock of the pregnancy anyway, and you can hardly blame him if that took a while, can you? But, imagined or not, I always felt there was a shadow in his eyes

when he looked at Jesus, as if to say, 'What *really* happened?'

And then there were those visits after the birth – first the shepherds, then those strangers from the East with their lavish gifts. It was gratifying, obviously, not every child gets that sort of attention, after all. But what made them come? – that's what I keep asking. What did their homage signify?

Don't think I'm ungrateful, but I really wish sometimes Jesus could have been an ordinary child, and the three of us left to enjoy our happiness – no fuss, no angels, no promises, simply the joy of being together.

But any last chance of that disappeared after those words of Simeon, that curious warning of his about the future. I've tried not to let it get to me, but it's preyed on my mind ever since, always that fear within me of tragedy round the corner.

So, you see, I had mixed feelings, very mixed, and I still do have, as much now as ever. I want to rejoice, to enjoy my boy while I still have him.

I want to count my blessings and thank God for all he's given.

But there's been a price to pay already, and deep within I've a horrible feeling that this business of being God's servant, of accepting his will and serving his kingdom, involves a far greater cost than I'd ever begun to imagine, and a price I'd rather not pay.

Prayer

Gracious God, alongside the blessings of discipleship there is always also the cost – sacrifices that will inevitably be asked of us, demands that we inevitably must face, responsibilities that we must inevitably accept. Hard though it is to accept, let alone understand, we realise there can be no joy without sorrow, no pleasure without pain, no life without death.

Yet we know also that, however great the price may be, the rewards of service far outweigh it, for you promise all who serve you lasting blessings that will never fail; treasure in heaven that nothing shall ever destroy. Help us, then, to offer all that is asked of us, until finally we rejoice in everything you hold in store for us and all your people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers by Linda Rudge

Holy God, in this week of Holocaust Memorial, and on the day of Candlemas, be our light in the darkness. Give us, we pray, insight and wisdom to stand for justice and speak out in truth. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, light of the world, **Amen.**

Lord, we pray for all ministers of the Word, and of the sacraments. By your spirit, give strength to all those who speak clearly and with authority in your name. We thank you once more for Vanda, our Rector, and we pray for her and her family as she prepares for a new life in Christ in another place – we will miss her. We pray too for our churchwardens, ministers, council members and worship leaders as they support her, and all of us, in this period of reflection and change.

*Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer***

Lord, we give thanks for all those Christians and all people of faith and virtue who help others who are being persecuted. We pray too for those who minister to people who have become persecutors, or who have lost their way. We pray for prisoners, for their wardens and chaplains, for refugees and their guardians, and for those who live in poverty. We pray for ourselves – you know us, and what we each need to do to bring your kingdom to earth.

*Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer***

Lord, we pray for our wellbeing in our minds, bodies and souls. We are so often tired and anxious, and while we celebrate the good things you bring us and the moments of love, joy and light, we need your comforting presence. We pray at this time for those who are ill and who need your special care at this time. In this continuing pandemic we pray especially for our nurses, doctors, care workers, and funeral staff that they may find strength, be comforted and feel they are appreciated by us all.

*Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer***

Lord, we give you thanks for your liberating power of love and for freedom from sin and death. You have given to us a light shining from the glory of your kingdom. We pray now for all those who have died, and for those who are dismayed and bereaved by the loss of loved ones and friends. May they find comfort, and may those who are with you in heaven shine a light for us all.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ - Amen.

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna, who lived to welcome the Messiah: may we, who have received these gifts beyond words, prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes to bring us to eternal life; for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen.**

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