

Sermon

The Feast of the Presentation February 2, 2025

Luke 2:22-40

Today is the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple, which happens 40 days after Christmas. It is also known as the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin, Candlemas, and (in the Eastern Church) the Meeting of Christ with Simeon. Today is the day when Jesus was dedicated to God because he is Mary's firstborn child (Ex. 13:2). According to Jewish law, it's the day of purification for the mother of a son (Lev. 12:1-4). It is the meeting of the old (Simeon) and the new (Jesus). And when we recognize the lengthening of days and light, both spiritual and physical, taking hold, candles are blessed in some churches to symbolize that light. There is a lot going on today. And with everything happening on this day, I want to focus on the interaction of Simeon with the Holy Family and how that impacts us.

When Mary and Joseph go to the Temple to present Jesus as was required, they encounter Simeon, a "devout and righteous man." He takes Jesus into his arms and says some of the most famous words in Scripture. This canticle is known as the *Nunc dimittis*, or Song of Simeon, and has been used at Evening Prayer since the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century. From there it became the closing canticle at Compline and appears in all but one edition of the BCP. For Vestry members, and those who read Compline regularly, you may be more familiar with this version:

*Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised;  
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, whom you have prepared for all the world to see.  
A light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.*

Epiphany is the season of manifestation and revelation. The gospel readings will, in some way, point to Christ and reveal him as the Savior of the world. From the wise men to his baptism, from his miracles to prophecies, we are being pointed toward Christ. In these words from Simeon we hear once more about the universality of Christ - "For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior whom you have prepared for **ALL THE WORLD** to see."

In this gospel passage, Jesus is being presented in the Temple to the Lord as being holy to the Lord and Simeon recognizes that he is the Savior for all the world. This is obviously good news.

Part of that good news now is that we, as children of God, are also presented in this place as being holy to the Lord. As we say in Rite 1, “we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies.” By presenting our selves, our souls and bodies to the Lord, we become a light to enlighten the nations. In the absence of Jesus, we have been, and continue to be, prepared to reflect the light of Christ to the people around us. It is now our job to shine that light on the world around us.

One unfortunate side effect of this, though, is a belief that by shining the light of Christ, or by being a follower of Christ, things will always be sunny. Things will always be positive. We will always be blessed. But that is not always the case.

Simeon’s closing remarks are that Jesus will be responsible for the rising and falling of many, and that a sword will pierce Mary’s soul. Following Christ isn’t always joy and peace and love.

When we offer and present our selves, souls, and bodies to the Lord, when we shine the light of Christ onto the world, we need to know that a sword may pierce our soul also.

It’s true that when you shine a light in a dark place, the darkness does not overcome the light. But it’s also true that when you shine a light in the darkness, shadows appear. The light drives away darkness, but it also creates spaces where shadows exist.

When we speak of showing empathy to those in pain, it creates shadows that proclaim those in pain brought it on themselves. When we speak of being merciful, it creates shadows that proclaim vengeance. When we speak of the universal love of God, it creates shadows that cry out in hate. The shadow attacks on those who proclaim the light of Christ, who proclaim empathy and compassion, who ask for mercy, are vicious, painful, and soul piercing. But if we turn off the light, or if we stop proclaiming the light, then the darkness wins.

Today is the Feast of the Presentation. It’s the day when Simeon proclaimed the light of God to be shining on all nations. As Jesus was presented in the Temple to be designated as holy to the Lord, let us also present our selves, souls, and bodies to be holy to the Lord. As Jesus brought the light of God but was attacked by the

shadows, let us also remember that in proclaiming the light of God we may also face attacks from the shadows of darkness.

As this Feast points to Jesus being a light to enlighten the nations, but also warned of soul-piercing pain, we must choose to stand in the light of love and face pain from the shadows. Because if we don't shine the light of love, regardless of the cost, then we become complicit in allowing the darkness to take hold.

Amen.