

The Presentation of the Lord, Year C

GOSPEL

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When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord,—observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord—and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.'

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected—and a sword will pierce your own soul too—so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

(Luke 2:22-40)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- 'The Law of the Lord' refers to the Torah, or the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures, sometimes called the Pentateuch. It was believed that these five books were written by Moses—thus the law of Moses.
- The Torah contains many regulations and laws relating to how Jews should lead their lives, including ritual purification. Leviticus 12 outlines the regulations that tell

how a woman must become purified after childbirth, a process that included a ritual bath and the offering of a sacrifice of pigeons or doves.

- Mary and Joseph are acting as practising, pious Jews in following the requirements of the Law after the birth of Jesus.
- This text is unique to Luke's Gospel. No other gospel tells us as much of the early years of Jesus as Luke does.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel text is another example of the 'manifestation' of who Jesus is. Luke sets his action in the heart of Judaism, in the temple itself. Mary and Joseph are pious Jews doing all that the Law requires of them. The two characters who are introduced—Simeon and Anna—are both also depicted by Luke as pious Jews. Simeon is 'an upright and devout man', while Anna 'served God night and day with fasting and prayer.' They would both have seen many first-born sons presented at the temple in consecration to the Lord. But they see something in this particular child that goes beyond the expected. They recognise this child as 'the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations', and Anna speaks of the child 'to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem'.

The reaction of the parents is natural under such circumstances: 'They stood there wondering at the things being said about him.' Mary is warned that being the mother of such a child will not be easy for her: 'a sword will pierce her soul.' For Mary, adherence to the will of God will come at a price.

- What do you understand will be your obligations once you are baptised or received into the Church? Are there things that need to be clarified for you?
- How is Christ made manifest in the world today?
- Do you know people who you would describe as 'pious'? What does that mean?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What does it mean today to be 'upright and devout'?
- How do you understand the salvation offered by Christ?
- Think of the various rituals in which you may have taken part. These could have been part of a religious tradition, cultural custom or even joining a group or association. Describe for other members of the group what the ritual involved. Talk of the symbolism of some of the ritual actions involved.
- Consider this week the difference between doing what the rules and regulations require and truly living the life of a Christian. In what ways does this offer a challenge to you?
- Use this week's gospel acclamation as your prayer this week:

This is the light of revelation to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel. Alleluia!

