

The Holy Family, Year B

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

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 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

- According to Jewish Law, after giving birth a woman had to undergo a purification, which consisted of a ritual bathing and the offering of a sacrifice. The offering of turtle doves or pigeons was the offering of the poor.
- Also according to Jewish Law, the first-born male child of a family was dedicated to God in acknowledgment that all life comes from God. Mary and Joseph were devout and observant Jews.

EXPLORING THE WORD

All four characters in today's gospel are devout and observant Jews, faithfully waiting for the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. But the time of waiting has come to an end. In many ways, Simeon's words are universal, representing the whole of Israel's wait: 'Now Lord, you can let your servant go in peace ... because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all nations.' Likewise, Anna proclaims to all Jerusalem the identity of this child. Both point to Jesus as the visitation of God, not only to those traditionally seen as the people of God but to all the nations. The salvation brought is universal. Mary's 'yes' to God's plan has brought fulfillment of the promise, but still she is left wondering what that will mean in the future.

- Do you wonder what it will mean for your future now that faith in Christ has become a focus of your life?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Simeon warns Mary that a sword will pierce her heart. Have there been painful times in your family? Can you make sense of those painful times now? Was there personal growth or strength that resulted from the pain?
- Most of us grow to maturity in a human family, which today may come in many shapes. Reflect on your own childhood and growth. Looking back, in what ways did this childhood encourage or discourage faith in God? Share your reflections with the group.
- What holds families together is a commitment to love and serve each other in good times and bad. This is what allows families to grow in maturity and wisdom.
- Recite Simeon's prayer often this week:
My eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations.
- Offer assistance to a member of your own or your new Christian family who may be struggling.

