

THE PRESENTATION

LUKE 2:22-40

Can you believe that we are already in the second month of the New Year? They say that the older you become, the faster the time goes- and let me tell you, that is very true! You will all find out about this someday.

And at the beginning of this month, we celebrate a very important day in our church season. The presentation of Jesus in the temple. The presentation harkens to the Jewish law that every firstborn son- it, of course, had to be a male, had to be dedicated to god in memory of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt. Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus forty days after his birth to the temple for this occasion as well as for the purification of Mary.

There are other names by which this particular event is called. It is sometimes called the purification of St. Mary the virgin - unfortunately women were considered dirty after the birth of a child and not allowed into the temple until purified. It has been called the meeting of Christ with Simeon and the meeting of the lord in eastern orthodox churches. But the one that intrigues me is Candlemas. Are any of you familiar with this one? I am, but of course, I go way back.

I have a story to tell you about this which you could possibly disbelieve. The other night I was talking to my daughter on the phone about Candlemas because I wanted more information about it. She checked her computer- I have trouble with mine- it was useless because she found only that Candlemas was another name for this date- nothing about it. Well, it was early the next morning, my daughter phoned me. Guess why? When she got up, she looked in her phone in case she had received any calls during the night. And what did she find? Believe it or not, an entire paper written about Candlemas. This was not one she tried to find- it just appeared. Guess who offered this?

I am sure you have information about Candlemas which goes way back and is a very old holiday with a Christian-pagan history. I won't go into this very deeply as I really want to talk about Simeon and Anna, but it does say that churches should bless all the candles on this date that are to be used during that church year. And please do not forget another very important name for this date- one that I think is remembered by more people than the other names- groundhog's day. It was important for Mary and Joseph to present the baby, forty days after his birth, to the temple- to god. It was also the time for mothers to go to the temple

for purification as women were considered dirty after child birth and not allowed in the temple until purified.

Our gospel reading today from Luke entails what leading characters? Did you notice? Two elderly people- Anna and Simeon- which I find fascinating. I think that elderly people in those days were much more respected than in this day and age.

In the book of Job, it says "wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding." Very interesting, but, of course I would have included women. Proverbs says, "the silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in righteousness." And there are many more favorable passages about the elderly. How do you find that the elderly are treated in this day and age?

So, let's talk a bit about these two elderly characters and see what their relationship to God was and exactly what they did during their lifetimes.

I am going to start with Anna, who was in attendance in the temple with Simeon. Her age is stated as being in the eighties, but, because she was married for a very short time when she was very young, they are not sure if they counted her years after she had become a widow or before. In Luke, it says of the aged Anna that she seldom departed from the temple, and served God with fasts and prayers. Because of her devotion to God, she was present in the temple when the baby Jesus came so she was able to see him; the Savior of the world along with Simeon. Now, Simeon had a burning desire to see the Lord. When he was elderly, he was led by the Holy Spirit to the temple. He was led the exact same day, at the exact same time when he just so happened to bump into Mary, Joseph, and, of course, the baby Jesus. Perfect timing. Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus had no expectations of encountering the old man, Simeon, who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, the baby Jesus, in person. In this way, Simeon was preparing himself for death and the life there after.

The first great strength Simeon had was his devotion to God as shown in verse twenty-five in today's reading, "Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout and the Holy Ghost was upon him."

Simeon was "just", meaning he was honest... he possessed a moral character. Simeon was also called "devout", meaning that he was known for 'seeking out things that were from God and doing his best to live up to God's standards'.

In Luke we read of Simeon waiting for the consolation of Israel. This is a term for the restoration of the people and the fulfillment of God's redemptive work.

Remember, the Holy Spirit had promised Simeon that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, the baby Jesus. And this was the time.

Simeon became content, because he had met his Savior in the flesh, and Simeon could now die in peace and look forward to being with the Lord. He held the baby in his arms and said prophetic words over him- prophetic words, or if you wish to call it a prayer, is called the Nunc Dimittis

It tells us that Christ would bring all peoples- both Jews and gentiles; light, the symbol of life, growth, knowledge, and happiness.

Like Simeon, our eyes have seen god's salvation as we, too, await the coming of Christ.

Please listen to the Nunc Dimittis:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
According to thy word;
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people,
To be a light to lighten the gentiles,
And to be the glory of thy people Israel. Amen