

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 2:32

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

A light of revelation to the Gentiles
and glory for your people Israel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:22-40; L524

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, *Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,* and to offer the sacrifice of *a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,* in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:
"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."

*Continued in Appendix A, p. 268, or
Luke 2:22-32 in Appendix A, p. 268.*

Reflecting on the Gospel

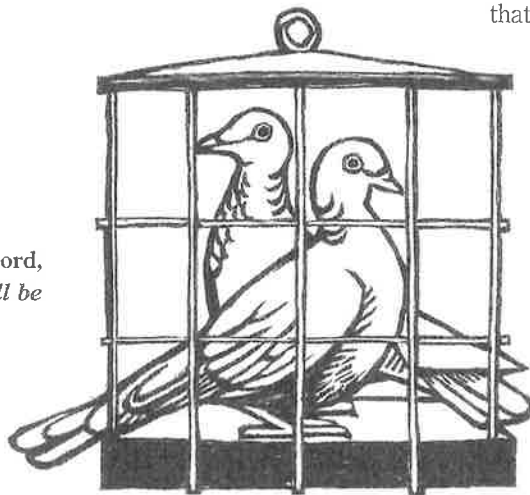
When dealing with children or even with adults(!), it's good to keep things fair. We do not want to favor one over the other, for such is the breeding ground of jealousy and resentment. It is important to make sure that there is an even or equitable distribution.

Today's gospel is from Luke, who gives us more stories about women than any other gospel. In fact, often throughout the Gospel of Luke there is a story of a man paired with a story of a woman. And, in fact, we see this pairing today with Simeon and Anna.

Ideally, we will hear the "longer" version of the gospel today to include the story of Anna. There are so few stories of women in the gospels

that it does not seem right to read only a portion of the story, in effect clipping out Anna, shortening it so that we hear only about Simeon rather than Simeon and Anna.

Joseph and Mary are fulfilling the obligations of Mosaic Law, the precepts of their faith. Both Simeon and Anna are in the temple, and each encounters the child Jesus—Simeon having been there at the prompting of the Spirit, and Anna because she never left the temple. Both are prophets, though Luke properly uses the feminine form, "prophetess," of Anna. Not only does Anna give thanks to God, but she also speaks about the child to those in her midst.



Luke sets this story in Jerusalem, in the temple, where Zechariah, the priest and father of John the Baptist, first learned that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. Jerusalem will also be the location where the gospel ends. Luke is geographically bookending his story as it were.

After Joseph and Mary leave the temple, having fulfilled the precepts of the law, they return to their home in Nazareth, and we never hear of Simeon and Anna again. Their respective prophecies continue themes from Luke that were sounded by Elizabeth and by Mary herself. Jesus is destined to be the rise and fall of many. The hungry will be filled and the rich will be sent away empty.

The gospel story for the presentation of the Lord is "rich" with theological significance and meaning. Luke gives us not only the perfunctory fulfillment of Mosaic Law, but also those actions accompanied by a prophet and by a prophetess. We would do well to read the story to include both Simeon and Anna, and not snub the significant role of a woman to save a few minutes during Mass.

Living the Paschal Mystery

It should go without saying that women figure prominently in some of the most remembered stories about Jesus, including his birth, death, and resurrection. And here today we have the story of his presentation, accompanied by the presence of Simeon and Anna. Many other stories about Jesus feature men so prominently that it seems only right to read today's gospel in its entirety. In so doing, we are reminded of something we know well: women speak the powerful words of God just as men do. In the Old Testament and in the New, women were prophets (prophetesses). When given the opportunity, let us showcase this too

often neglected aspect of our rich faith. And in our own world, in our own day and age, let's listen attentively to the prophetesses in our own midst. Luke gives equal voice to the women. We would do well to follow his example.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: “[M]y eyes have seen your salvation, / which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: / a light for revelation to the Gentiles, / and glory for your people Israel.”

To the point: Simeon's words in the temple tell us who this child is and who he is meant for. The gift of Jesus, God with us, is hailed in this gospel reading as “consolation,” “Christ of the Lord,” “salvation,” “light,” and “glory.” Simeon ends his proclamation of praise, which the church treasures to this day in the *Nunc Dimittis* (The Canticle of Simeon), with the universal nature of Jesus' birth. This child, born in humble surroundings to an unknown peasant family, belongs not only to his mother and foster father, to his relatives, or even to his fellow countrymen. This child is light and glory for the whole world. With Simeon and Anna, let us lift our voices in praise!

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: In the lectionary, the first reading is chosen to correspond with the gospel. Sometimes the connections can be more obscure, but today's reading from Malachi seems to directly prophesy Simeon's fortuitous meeting with Jesus in the temple. Malachi writes, “[S]uddenly there will come to the temple / the Lord whom you seek, / And the messenger of the covenant whom you desire.” Within this passage we have two active participants: the promised one who arrives at the temple, but also the one who waits and longs for his coming.

to experience: In Simeon and Anna we find models of patience and trust faith in God's promises and goodness. Both have spent years upon years listening to God's word and waiting for God's revelation. Within the gospel passage their immense joy corresponds to the depth of their longing for this moment.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: The readings today invite us to hold in tension multiple ages of our Lord and Savior. The prophet Malachi paints a picture of the one who is coming as “refiner's fire,” sent to purify the people. In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is the high priest who “expiate[s] the sins of the people” through his own body and blood. In the gospel, he is a helpless baby only a little over a month old, and in today's psalm he is the king of glory, a mighty warrior.

to psalmist preparation: Within our faith we can look at each of these images and we say, “[Y]es, this is our Lord,” and yet, often as individuals we will find a particular way of looking at Jesus that resonates most within us. No single image, metaphor, or simile can encompass all aspects of Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Within today's readings, is there a way of considering Jesus that is new for you? How might this image deepen your relationship with Christ?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord is a traditional time to have candles blessed that will be used in the home throughout the coming year. On what occasions do you and your family light candles? How does the symbolism of the candle remind you of Jesus' presence?

Through the words of the prophet Malachi, God describes his messenger by saying, “[H]e is like the refiner's fire.” When was a time in your life when you felt like you experienced this refining fire of God?

The Presentation of the Lord, February 2, 2020

Gospel (cont.)

Luke 2:22-40; L524

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him;
and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,
“Behold, this child is destined
for the fall and rise of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be contradicted
—and you yourself a sword will pierce—
so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”
There was also a prophetess, Anna,
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.
She was advanced in years,
having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage,
and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.
She never left the temple,
but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.
And coming forward at that very time,
she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child
to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions
of the law of the Lord,
they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;
and the favor of God was upon him.