

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Heb 1:1-2

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

or:

Col 3:15a, 16a

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Let the peace of Christ control your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:22-40; L17B

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him 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.

Continued in Appendix A, p. 264, or Luke 2:22, 39-40 in Appendix A, p. 264.

Reflecting on the Gospel

“The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him.” (Luke 2:33)

The truth of the supposedly clichéd phrase “every child is a miracle” hits home for most people when a child is born to them or an adopted child is welcomed into the family. The instantaneous recognition of the child never before seen is a spiritual experience made tactile as a mother takes the newborn in her arms and a father gazes at an infant who evokes on sight the deepest of loves.



We tend to think of childbirth, especially today, as something that is simple and straightforward. It is certainly natural; and for many people, both in conception and at delivery, it poses no problems. Yet, there are many others for whom having a child is a struggle. We have no idea why some couples have no children and other families have one, why some women have miscarried numerous times or had ectopic pregnancies that threaten the lives of mother and child. We should never judge the size of a family, for we have no knowledge of the hidden burdens that many women and men carry. Many of the model families throughout the Bible were overjoyed that God blessed them with one child, a child they had long desired.

The miraculous nature of conception and childbirth is a theme that runs through the Old Testament and is often seen in families that have only one child. Numerous women who were considered “barren” give birth to a child of hope, often when it seemed such hope was out of reach. In this number we count Rebekah, Hannah, and the mother of Samson, all blessed with children when it seemed it could never happen. But the preeminent example is the first one we see in Genesis: Sarah.

Sarah was too old, as was Abram, to have and raise a child. But God gave them Isaac, a child of promise and hope for Abram, now called Abraham, and Sarah and for the future of a promised nation. The promised Messiah would come from this lineage and be given miraculously to Mary, which reveals another part of the equation: never having engaged in sexual intercourse, she was given a child by God—a child given to this new mother and her husband-to-be, but a child of hope for the whole world.

Yet the stories of the matriarchs, Mary, and their unique children indicate to us the miraculous nature of every birth. True, our children will probably not be patriarchs of a nation, as Isaac was for Israel; and certainly none can be Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior, both God and man. But the mothers were real mothers, just like women today, who raise many children or one child, or yearn for a child. And their children were real children, who had to be loved and raised. God chose to work his miracles not in opposition to nature but through the most natural of ways: childbirth.

But every family, whether gifted with many children or none or one, has a role to play in God’s dramatic story of salvation and shares in the miraculous gift of hope children represent. Each child has been willed by God to serve a unique purpose.

And it was through the birth of one child that all of us share in the hope of salvation. As Simeon says in Luke's gospel of the newborn baby boy Jesus, "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."

Mary and Joseph were "amazed at what was said about him," for he was the fulfillment of all hopes. But in the reality of the Holy Family, we see the miraculous nature of every child and every family reflected.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: "[M]y eyes have seen your salvation."

To the point: Within the simple family from Nazareth, Simeon recognizes the consolation and salvation he has been awaiting his entire life. We could ponder what it was about this child, these parents, that prompted Simeon to utter, "Now, Master, you may let your servant go / in peace." Only through the power of the Holy Spirit is Simeon given eyes to perceive the light of the world enfleshed in the newborn Jesus. Christ is present in our daily lives as well, in the people we meet inside and outside of our homes. Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit may we, too, be able to recognize him and serve him.

Connecting the Gospel

to the second reading: Today's gospel ends with the image of the child Jesus growing and becoming strong as he is brought up by Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. Within their daily lives from the time of Jesus's conception until the beginning of his public ministry, Mary and Joseph physically dwelt with the word of God, attending to his needs, teaching him, and learning from him. In

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

The writer of Sirach upholds caring for the elderly as an essential and honored duty. How are the elders in your community respected, cared for, and listened to?

The psalm refrain for today tells us we are blessed when we "walk in [God's] ways." How does this image of walking with God and keeping his ways relate to your faith journey?

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, December 27, 2020

Gospel (cont.)

Luke 2:22-40; L17B

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."

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.

or Luke 2:22, 39-40

When the days were completed for their purification

according to the law of Moses,

the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem

to present him to the Lord.

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.