

St. Luke 2:22-32

The Feast of the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Purification
of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Candlemass – 2019 A.✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

According to the Law, every male who opened the womb, the firstborn male, was presented to the Lord on the 40th day to be set apart, declared holy. At the same time, on the 40th day, the mother of a male child was required by the Law to present herself before the Priest to be declared ceremonially clean after childbirth. Forty is a number of great Biblical import. Four is the number of creation. Ten is the number of completeness, perfection. Forty indicates the intersection of the creation with perfection. And on this 40th day, the number 40 is fulfilled in a Divine way.

It was a strange keeping of the Law of which St. Luke testifies, an impossible keeping of the Law. There is no evidence in Scripture that this Onlybegotten Son, this Firstborn Child, born of the Virgin Mary, opened the womb. He was conceived and born indeed, Scripture testifies clearly to that. But He was conceived and born without sin. He was born miraculously. It was a birth unlike any other.

Mary's womb well may have remained closed even though she gave birth, for in the case of the birth of the Christ the ancient curse had no authority. So too Mary needed no purification. Free of concupiscence, her conception was of the Holy Spirit. The miraculous birth would have made her cleaner. And the Divine Child had no need of being declared holy, for He is the source of all holiness. He had no need of being set apart for God, because He is God Incarnate. He was conceived and born without spot or blemish, the True Sacrifice.

It was to keep the Law that Mary and Joseph brought God's Son to the Temple. But they brought the One through whom the Law was given, the One who would fulfill the Law. And in His coming into the Temple, the ancient Words of the Prophet Malachi were fulfilled, as the promised Lord came suddenly into His Temple. The Child Simeon held is the God for whom the Temple was built, and every sacrifice that reddened the Temple sands testified of Him.

It was not for Him, but for you, that He was presented. For in His perfect keeping of the Law, He was presented in the Temple in the substance of your flesh, so that by Him you be presented to God the Father with a pure and clean heart. So the Prophet calls the Lord in whom you delight the Messenger of the Covenant.

For by Him is the New Covenant instituted, the New Testament in His Blood. But before that Blood would be spilled, He would live a perfect life, a life lived in the Flesh, a life lived in your flesh, a life lived in perfect holiness, a life given for the life of the world.

Note how the Prophet connects the coming of the Messiah with the judgment of the Last Day: "Behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?" It is a rhetorical question. The answer is no one. No one born of human father can stand in that day, for all men are conceived and born in sin.

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And no one can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. That is more than a generic problem for mankind, although it is that. But more importantly, a bit closer to home, it is a problem for you. For you are born in sin that separates you from the God who created you.

So it is for you that the Infant Lord was presented in the Temple built for Him. The ancient prophesy is fulfilled by the Divine Presence of the Holy Child now again in His House of Prayer. And as the Psalmist foretold, now the Lovingkindness of God was in the midst of midst of His Temple. It is in that Lovingkindness that you have hope.

On the Last Day the same Christ will return, as He has promised. He will judge all men. For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver, as the consuming fires of the Last Day erase all sinfulness and corruption.

Simeon was told by the Holy Spirit that He would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Both things are true of all men. We will all die, and we will all see Christ. But to see Christ before death is quite different than to die in unbelief and see Him on the Last Day.

Faith sees Christ now, - the Lord Christ, who Simeon saw first by faith, and then with his eyes. So too do you see Christ by faith before you die – and seeing you do not die, you live forever. But woe to those who see Him only after they die – for they see Him on Judgment Day, never having known Him.

But you, dear Christian, You, O Redeemed of Christ, You who believe in Him by faith worked by the same Spirit that gave Simeon to know Him; in Christ you are set apart, you are declared holy before the Lord. It is for you that He was conceived and born without sin. It is for you that He lived a holy and perfect life in the Flesh. It is for you that He rendered that life for your salvation. He is your Light and your Life. He is your Presentation and your Purification.

It is your body that God makes His Temple as His Spirit fills you in baptism. For of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.” And in a Mystery as great as His Presentation, He presents Himself to you this day, here, in this Temple of God. He presents Himself in Bread and Wine. You eat the Body Simeon held. You drink the Blood shed for you for the remission of sins.

So you can pray with faithful Simeon “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.” For by faith you have seen Him. By faith your eyes have seen God's Salvation, the Salvation which God has prepared before the face all people – a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the true Israel, the Holy catholic and Apostolic Church, the Church of Christ.

By His Precious Blood you are purified, your sins are removed. It is He that purifies you, and presents you to God the Father, holy and righteous before Him by grace through faith. And although the candle you held this morning has been extinguished, the Light of Christ will illumine you forever.

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