

***In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Have you ever found yourself in just the right place at just the right time? Perhaps it was a moment when time seemed to stand still-everything else faded away. You knew you were where you should be and everything that happened there felt good and right? Have you ever looked at someone you had never met before and there was instant recognition - a connection - an irresistible feeling that you knew that person? Perhaps at the time you called it fate. Maybe later you said you were “led by the Spirit.”

We can imagine that the day we heard about in our Gospel reading this morning, began as a happy day for Mary and Joseph. They finally reached Jerusalem with the baby Jesus after travelling about 60 miles from Nazareth. They were doing what any devout Jewish couple would do after the birth of their firstborn son. They were bringing him to the Temple to present him to the priest and dedicate him to God and to offer a poor family’s sacrifice of two small birds.

Mary must have been especially happy that day too. Her forty days of required isolation were over and she soon would be declared “clean” after the birth of her child.

There was an old man in the Temple...we cannot know how Simeon's day started out. He may have been in the marketplace sharing news with his friends. He may have been walking down the street on an errand, whatever he was doing, Scripture tells us he turned from whatever he was doing and was led by the Spirit into the Temple.

When Joseph and Mary brought the child into the Temple and Simeon spotted them - he knew this was the moment he had been waiting for all his life. The Holy Spirit had let him know that he would not die until his eyes had seen the Messiah.

Simeon looked at that child wrapped in simple cloth and he knew he saw the king.

It is as if Jesus' whole life flashed before Simeon's eyes. In those few moments Simeon knew that Jesus would be a source of salvation for the world. He looked at Mary and knew that her life would be marked by pain.

He took the child in his arms and one can imagine that tears of joy streamed down his face as he sang or chanted the words of praise that still speak to us today in 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.***

Now Simeon could die in peace. He felt God's saving grace in the warm body of that little child.

Could he have known that the sword that would pierce Mary's soul was the cross on which Jesus would die?

Could he have known that Jesus' suffering and death would be a source of light and glory for the world?

And then there was Anna who was always praying in the Temple. Old and widowed, she too was tuned into the Spirit. She too saw the destiny of the child. It would be so easy to overlook her; only two verses in Scripture record her witness.

But Anna may well have been the first Christian woman preacher. She praised God and recognized Jesus as the Messiah and proclaimed the Good News to all who were looking for salvation.

Today we think of Anna and Simeon and their witness - for being open to the Spirit and seeing Jesus as the consolation of Israel and light of salvation for all of us.

There would have been many other people in the Temple that day. They were busy, lost in their own concerns - haggling over the law and selling sacrifices. Who else, I wonder would stop and look - who else would listen.

What can we learn from this story of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple?

Simeon teaches us to be open to the Spirit - to be willing to change our course.

Simeon teaches us that God shows up unexpectedly.

So often we fail to recognize the grace of God at work in our lives because we don't take time to really look or listen.

Anna teaches us that a life centred around prayer and worship opens us up to the guidance of the Spirit and allows us to speak about Jesus.

Through Jesus, the light of God came to people everywhere.

In our baptism we are each given the light of Christ and as bearers of that light God calls us to bring light to the world and speak about the Saviour.

Light is a powerful image – whether we think of it as coming from a candle, or a light house.

For just as light overcomes darkness;

Just as light leads the way;

Just as light gives warmth and causes life to flourish...

so too does the light of Christ.

In our times of sadness, and in the darkness of this so often broken and divided world, as Christians we cannot afford to hide the light of Christ under a bushel or keep it confined behind these walls.

The Christian mission for each of us is to sing out like Simeon and to speak up like Anna.

To tell all those who will listen about the wonderful things Jesus has done in our lives.

If for you, action speaks louder than words, then the kind things we do to bring healing and goodness and hope to the lives of others, will shine for them like candles in the dark.

Each of us, can in our lives, in our words and actions, and in our faces, reflect the light of God's love and act as channels of his healing grace – as Joy Cowley expresses in her poem, which I share with you now...

Today we remember the way in which Simeon and Anna holding the baby Jesus close to their hearts were bathed in the light of God's love. As we share Communion together today, and receive into our hands these tokens of God's love made known in Christ, may we too be bathed in that same light, and reflect the light of God's love to all around us.

Amen