

Robin Dodge
Holy Faith, Santa Fe
2 February 2025

Feast of the Presentation
Malachi 3.1-4
Psalm 24.7-10
Hebrews 2.14-18
Luke 2.22-40

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are a lot of things happening here today: processions, praying over there in the corner, [censing] for purifying, people coming and going, presenting Jesus in the temple. [Pause] Oh, you're thinking I was talking about what's happening here in this service at Holy Faith. No, I'm talking about what's happening in the Temple, what's happening in our Gospel story. It's the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple.

It's also the Purification of Mary or, as the Gospel puts it, the purification of both Mary and Joseph, because Luke tells us it was time for their purification according to the law of Moses. But the law of Moses in Leviticus requires only the woman, after giving birth to a son, to wait forty days before coming to the priest and making a purification offering. At the same time, the child is presented to the Lord because in Exodus God commanded Moses that "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord" in remembrance of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, when the firstborn sons of the Egyptians died and those of Israel were spared. This idea is closely-related to the principle of the tithe: the "first-fruits" of the womb, just like the "first-fruits" of the field, just like the "first-fruits" of all creation, belong to God. On the fortieth day after birth, the firstborn son was to be presented in the Temple, offered to God, and

redeemed instead by a substitutionary sacrifice for the life of the child. So, Joseph and Mary, being the observant Jewish parents that they were, took Jesus to the temple to present him to God and redeem him with a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. The Divine Redeemer first becomes the human redeemed.

And that's why we celebrate today, the fortieth day after Jesus' birth (sure, go ahead and count back the number of days to Christmas), this Feast of the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple, this Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But wait...there's more. There's more happening here today. (And I'm not even talking about the Evensong at 6:00 tonight!) From the year 542, the Emperor Justinian ordered the observance in Constantinople of the Feast of the Meeting, which this day is still called in the Eastern Orthodox Church. One commentator noted, "Such a variety of names is sufficient testimony to the wealth of spiritual meaning that generations of Christians have discovered in this small incident." [Lesser Feasts and Fasts 1991, p. 204]

This day is also called the Feast of the Meeting because it commemorates Jesus' meeting two other important characters in our Gospel story – Simeon and Anna. We're told that Simeon was a righteous and devout man, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, looking for God's promised restoration of Israel's independence. Most importantly, we're told that the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he wouldn't die before seeing the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Now Simeon was just wandering the streets of Jerusalem when the Spirit guided him into the Temple. And there, Mary and Joseph, perhaps thinking Simeon was a priest, presented Jesus to him. And when Simeon took Jesus in his arms, he

blessed God and said, “Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised; for these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, whom you have prepared for all the world to see: a Light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.” (The words called the Song of Simeon or the *Nunc dimittis*, is the canticle regularly used at the daily office of Evening Prayer) As one commentator has put it: “When Mary placed [Jesus] into the arms of Simeon, it was the meeting of the Old and New [Rites]. The old sacrifices, the burnt offerings and oblations, were done away; a new and perfect offering had come into the temple. God had provided himself a lamb for the burnt-offering..., his only Son. The offering was to be made once for all on the cross. At every Eucharist those who are in Christ recall that sinless offering and unite ‘[our]selves, [our] souls and bodies’ with the self-oblation of [our] Lord and Savior.” [Lesser Feasts and Fasts 1991, p. 204] As I said, the Divine Redeemer first becomes the human redeemed. And Simeon prophecies about this offering that Jesus will make, “This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed” – the conflict between God’s saving purpose and human opposition – “so that the inner thoughts of many” – of human resistance and rejection – “will be revealed,” and to Mary, “a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Also in the Temple at the time was Anna, a prophet. Unlike Simeon who was wandering outside and guided by the Spirit into the temple, Anna was always there. I know some of you can identify with Anna – you feel like you’re always here! We’re told that Anna didn’t leave the Temple. She was there worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And seeing Jesus in Simeon’s arms, she began to praise God and spoke about Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

So why are you here today; why are you here in this church, in this temple? Perhaps you're here to see all the things happening today: processions, praying over there in the corner, [censing] for purifying, people coming and going, all this glorious liturgy. Perhaps you're like Mary and Joseph, the observant and dutiful worshippers who are here because that is what is expected. You come together week by week for worship with the community, as is the duty of all Christians according to the Catechism; along with working, praying, and giving for the spread of the kingdom of God, (BCP p. 856).

Perhaps you're like Simeon. You were wandering along the streets of Santa Fe and the Holy Spirit guided you here. You felt like you were searching for something and you were propelled through these doors. I believe everyone who crosses this threshold is drawn here by the Holy Spirit. You all have choices of what to do with your Sunday morning, and I believe it's an act of the Holy Spirit to move people, especially those who have never been here before or are returning from a season away, to drop the other distractions of their life and come worship the living and life-giving God.

Perhaps you're like Anna – you're always here. (And you know who you are!) And like Anna, you do not depart from God. You're worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. You know that through these liturgies you are drawn to the living God and your life is sustained by them.

Perhaps you're here because you just want to fulfill the words of today's collect, the prayer that opened this liturgy: "as your [thy] only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple, so [may we] be presented [un]to you [thee] with pure and clean hearts by [the same thy Son] Jesus Christ our Lord." You know, those of us who have

been baptized have already been presented to the Lord. Holy Baptism is a way of parents presenting to God the first fruits of their love and thanking God for the blessing of new life. Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. (BCP p. 858) Holy Baptism also is our commissioning for ministry in Christ's name. In response to the question in the Catechism, that Outline of the Faith in the back of the Prayer Book, "What is the ministry of the laity?", the answer is: "The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church." (BCP p. 855).

In fact, the answers to the Catechism's questions about the ministry of all four orders – lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons – all begin in the same way: "to represent Christ and his Church" or, in light of today's feast, "to re-present Christ and his Church." You see, once we have been presented to God in Holy Baptism and commissioned for ministry, we are called to re-present Christ and his Church to the world. Just as Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to God, so we re-present Jesus to all those whom we meet. On this Feast of the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple, may we remember despite all the things going on in our lives to re-present Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever we may be; to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take our place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church. Amen.