

Sermon for Presentation of Our Lord Year A 2020  
*Showing Up and Seeing Salvation*

This morning a group of men  
dressed in tuxedos and top hats  
have gathered at the edge of a groundhog's den  
to await the appearance of Punxsutawney Phil—  
We here in America largely mark  
February 2<sup>nd</sup> as “Groundhog’s Day”.  
Most of us don’t know that this American celebration  
has its roots in the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord,  
which is also known as Candlemas.  
The presentation of Jesus in the temple 40 days after his birth  
is a minor festival in the Christian calendar.  
This festival is called Candlemas (or Candle Mass)  
because it was the tradition to bless all the candles  
that would be used in the church—and in homes—  
in the coming year.  
Over time, the candles came to represent how long and cold the  
winter would be.  
In fact, there is an old English poem that shows the connection  
between Candlemas and Groundhog’s day . . .  
*If Candlemas be fair and bright,  
Come winter, have another flight.  
If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,  
Go winter, and come not again.*  
As you know . . . all those people  
who show up on Gobbler’s Knob, Punxsutawney, PA,  
are waiting and watching to see if good old Phil  
will see his shadow or not—

According to the Groundhog Club, Phil speaks to the in  
Groundhogese to the Club President—  
which only the club president can understand—  
and then his prediction is translated for the entire world.  
We may not all be waiting with bated breath for Phil and the  
announcement . . . but aren't we all just a little sad and  
disappointed if he sees his shadow and the prediction  
is six more weeks of winter?

We laugh and enjoy this waiting game . . .  
and, yet, stop and think about Simeon and Anna  
in today's gospel story.

Simeon and Anna had lives of expectation,  
anticipation, and waiting.

Ancient Christian tradition says that Simeon was one of the  
seventy translators of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek—  
what we call the Septuagint.

That translation was completed in the year 132 before Christ  
was born.

So . . . have you done the math?

That means Simeon was a really old guy.

One strand of the tradition says that Simeon  
was 270 years old when Jesus was presented in the temple.

Another strand of the tradition says  
Simeon died at the age of 360.

Now let's not get stuck on his age—  
asking whether anyone could live to that age.  
That's not the point.  
The better question is—  
what does it mean for us that Simeon (and Anna)  
kept waiting and watching for so long?  
What is the tradition trying to tell us?

Day after day, Simeon and Anna  
lived their days, years, decades with hope,  
trust, expectation, and anticipation.  
Every day for weeks, months, years, decades—  
centuries?—Simeon and Anna are  
waiting and wondering,  
“Is this the day?  
Is this the day I will see salvation  
or is this the day I will give up hope?”  
“Is this the day I will experience the fulfillment of the promise,  
or is this the day I despair of it ever being fulfilled.”

As we observed together earlier,  
their lives were lived in expectation, anticipation,  
and . . . waiting.  
Who among us has not had his or her life characterized by  
expectation, anticipation, and waiting?  
Haven't we all stood in that place waiting for  
and needing something to happen,  
living in expectation and hope,  
anticipating the future,  
and wondering if today was the day.

We got up each morning and had to decide whether we still believed in God's future or whether we would give up.

We all know what it's like to wait – waiting for life to change,  
for the grief to go away,  
for a prayer to be answered,  
for joy to return,  
for forgiveness and reconciliation,  
for clarity about a decision,  
for meaning and purpose,  
for healing and new life.  
We wait and hope for all sorts of things.

We have all sorts of hopes and expectations for what God is doing in our lives and our world. I think we all come here this morning with some hope, some need, some expectation. We come here trusting and anticipating the promise that God is present and working in our lives even if we can't see or clearly understand what it might be. We show up and we wait for the miracle. That's what Simeon and Anna did.

So, what's the miracle for Simeon, for Anna?  
For us?  
I don't think it is the great ages of Simeon and Anna.  
And it isn't that Simeon held the baby Jesus  
Or that Simeon's eyes saw salvation  
and was set free to go to in peace,

Or that Anna, upon seeing him, burst into praise and preaching about the infant Jesus.

Those things are happening all the time.

The presentation of Jesus is all around us.

So . . . what is the miracle for Simeon and Anna?

Simeon and Anna continued to show up.

They continued to be vigilant and attentive.

They continued to trust the promise.

They continued to wait with hope and expectation.

They did not despair.

They did not walk away from the promise.

The miracle for Simeon and Anna and for us is in the showing up.

Sometimes showing up is the most difficult thing we do and it takes all we have to just show up.

But it's always the question before us.

Will we continue to show up?

Will we be awake and vigilant?

Will we live with hope and trust?

Showing up is the means through which God fulfills the promise to us and to Anna and to Simeon.

Anna and Simeon thought they were waiting for the salvation of God to show up but what if it was really Jesus—the salvation of God—

waiting for Anna and Simeon to show up?

Simeon thought he was presenting the child to God

but what if it was really the child presenting that

elderly man and that 84-year-old woman to God?

Every day that Anna and Simeon showed up,  
the salvation of God in Jesus the Messiah, the Christ,  
was seeing and upholding them.  
That's what this feast is about.

I learned this from a woman I came to know when I did my  
seminary field education at St. Matthew Trinity in Hoboken.  
Every week, this elderly and nearly blind woman  
who was somewhat confused and unaware of what was going on  
would come to worship, led by her caregiver.  
She would come forward for communion and hold out her  
hands to receive the body of Jesus, the Messiah—  
the one whose name means salvation.  
She would always ask me to pray for her.  
Her request was always the same—  
“For my eyes and for my mind.”  
Every week, though, she was just as blind and confused  
when she left, as when she came.

I couldn't help but wonder what was going on here.  
Then it came one day to me that what I was seeing  
was Anna and Simeon and the power of showing up.  
Somehow in her showing up,  
she understood with a confused mind what I didn't get—  
that Jesus was presenting her to God.  
She saw with eyes that were blind  
what mine could not see—her own salvation.

Every week she came and experienced this,  
and every week she was set free to go in peace.  
Her showing up was the fulfillment of God's promises  
in her life.

She showed up to salvation, to Christ, to freedom from blindness  
and confusion, and to peace.

She showed up to receive what was always already hers.

She showed up to the reality of her life.

What Simeon and Anna and that woman experienced  
can be ours too—if we but show up.

The presentation of Jesus doesn't happen

in the Jerusalem temple,

but in the temple of our lives,

every moment of every day,

day after day,

month after month,

year after year,

decade after decade . . .

and as the greater Church

century after century.

It happens in the midst of waiting.

It happens every time we show up to the reality of our lives.

God grant us grace to show up

and receive what is already ours.

Our own eyes have seen the Lord's salvation

and we are now free to go in peace.