

Today is a turning point. What do you carry on your heart and in your life that you would like to turn around or to change? Maybe it's a situation that you wish was different. Maybe it's something about yourself that you want to change. Today is a turning point. We're just about halfway between winter and spring. The days are getting longer, and for many of us this really helps our mood.

But it's not just a seasonal turning point. It's a turning point, too, for Mary and Joseph. Today is the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord, 40 days after Christmas, and the baby Jesus is brought to the Temple. Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the laws of their Jewish faith, and you can imagine their excitement. This was a day the Holy Family looked forward to – when Jesus could be brought out in public, 40 days after his birth. In my mother's day, when babies were born, mom & babe had to stay in the hospital for 10 days before being allowed home. When I had my two babies, I only stayed in hospital for 1 night! But Jewish law said that new mothers had to wait 40 days in a religious form of quarantine before they were considered ritually purified from the biological things that happen during childbirth. So yes, the Holy Family were excited on this day - it was a day of joy and pride. It was a turning point as they put aside Mary's somewhat unique pregnancy and uncomfortable delivery and turned their focus towards the future with their little child, dedicated to God.

In Exodus 13:1, “the Lord said to Moses: Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine.” Part of this consecration ceremony involved the offering of a **redemption sacrifice**, which was based on the Passover, as Exodus, chapter 13:13-15 tells us:

Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem. When in the future your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall answer, ‘By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.’”

And so it was a religious requirement for Mary and Joseph to present their firstborn son in the Temple and “redeem” him with an offering. For a middle-class family the offering would be a **lamb** that was free from any defect – but if you were a poor family, you could offer instead two turtledoves or two young pigeons. It was a special time for Mary and Joseph, and a turning point in their lives. But as we hear in today’s passage, the future of their little boy didn’t look quite as rosy as they had hoped.

This day was also a turning point for **Simeon and Anna** - two prophets who were full of faith. They waited in that Temple day in and day out, longing for the day when God would bring comfort to their people. Theirs was a life of patient hope, and they represented the hopes of all the Jewish people for whom suffering had become a daily reality, still clinging to God’s promise that one day it would all be made better.

Simeon and Anna recognized who Jesus was – they could see with the eyes of the Spirit. They knew in their hearts and in their souls that Jesus was “the One” – the Messiah. When they saw this little baby, they rejoiced, knowing that their wait was over. But for Mary, this joy was tinged with sadness. This baby, Simeon tells her, was destined to fight suffering with suffering, to overcome the trials of the world by facing trials of his own as he walked alongside his suffering people. Of course, Mary’s heart would be broken, too. But more important than this, Simeon declares that Jesus would save not just the Jewish people but the whole world from their suffering. Simeon praises God, confirming that Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

So, it was a turning point for us, too - good news for Israel and for all those who are not Jewish. And so not only do Simeon and Anna represent the hopes of the oppressed people of Israel, they also represent us and our hopes for freedom. All of us long to see positive change in our lives and in the world. Not superficial changes like getting a better car or winning the lottery, but deep longings about how we wish life were different. The hopes and dreams we have for those we love. The things that upset us when we watch the news and see people suffering. The good news is that this Messiah is for us, too, challenging and changing our world and our suffering, often in ways we don’t expect.

Today is a turning point from Christmas, the manger and the shepherds. It's the last story of Jesus as an infant, as we follow Jesus into his mission, and prepare to witness him suffer alongside his people and for our sin, knowing we'll eventually witness him rise from death – giving us a taste of what he will do when he comes back, to finish what he started – a new creation.

So that question I asked at the beginning, about the things or situations you wish were different, that you hope will change – place those things – those situations - into God's hands today. Place them knowing that the joy of spring is coming. We have a way to travel before we get there, but the light is here, and new life is coming. Each day is a turning point. Wake up earlier – get outside more and get more exercise! That's my plan, anyway... Of course, our journey will have ups and downs, that's inevitable – but know today, as Simeon and Anna knew, that Jesus is the Christ, sent by God to redeem and to light up the whole world. Amen.