

Lectionary Readings: 1 Samuel 1:21-28; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

Sermon Title: *Forty Days after Christmas*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for The Purification of Mary and The Presentation of Jesus is from our Gospel Reading: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the First Chapter.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, it's forty days after Christmas:

- Forty days for the gifts to be forgotten.
- Forty days for bills to really to sink in.
- And less than forty days for the New Year's resolutions to be either successful or given up.

Being it's forty days after Christmas:

- Today's Gospel brings us back in time a bit.
- Today's Gospel has a Christmas flavor, as Jesus here is a baby being carried in arms.

At Christmas, we expect big things. Not so today. On the secular calendar it's just Groundhog Day for those who care about the weather or Super Bowl Sunday for football fans. That's about it.

Yet today, a big thing happens: FORTY DAYS AFTER CHRISTMAS, EVERYTHING CHANGES WHEN JESUS COMES TO THE TEMPLE FOR US.

I. So, forty days after Christmas big things do happen:

- In keeping with the Torah, Mary and Joseph have brought the forty-day-old Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord. Their lives will surely be changed forever.
- A man waiting, Simeon, presumably into very old age, for a promise by the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled. His life will be changed forever.
- An eighty-four-year-old widow, Anna, who spent her life in the temple, "*worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day*" (v 37). Her life will be changed forever.

As well, with the events of this day in the temple, everything will change for you and me, and for every Christian man, woman, and child. Yes, everything will change.

As we consider the holy family, Mary and Joseph were like any other parents, in a way. When you ask parents what they wish for their child, the answer is always something like *happiness, health, a long life* – maybe that their child would grow up in the faith, maybe that their child would be a “*good person.*”

Very often parents also express their fears about their kids:

- They hope that they’ll be safe from harm, won’t get into drugs and alcohol or casual sex.
- They hope that their child won’t be corrupted by what’s on television.
- They pray that their child will never have to be sent off to war.

However, what parents are really saying in all this is that, they hope that their children will not *break their hearts*. They do want what’s best for their kids. But it’s also about their own feelings, hopes, dreams. They don’t want to have their own parental hearts broken.

What do these parents, Mary and Joseph, hear about Jesus? They hear Simeon’s prophetic word:

“Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts will be revealed” (vv 34–35).

Though Mary and Joseph are poor and may appear to be nobodies, the Son they carry to the temple will turn the world upside down. And so, with Simeon’s words:

- This Child won’t have our version of happiness.
- This Child will *lose* His health for the world’s sake.
- This Child’s earthly life *won’t* be a long one.

There are some other things about this Child:

- Those *in* the faith into which he was born, will consider Him to be *outside* of it.
- He won’t be safe from harm.
- He *will* hang out with alcohol abusers and prostitutes.
- And He will be sent off to a *war* against nothing less than sin, death, the devil, and hell.

Therefore, not only will this Child bring about the fall and rising of many in Israel. Jesus will bring about the fall and rising of the whole world. The Bible says He is the stumbling stone (Psalm 118:22; 1 Peter 2:7). That means those who are offended by Him, those who reject His love, those who want the world to stay its old broken, hurtful way, will *fall* before Him.

But the lowly, the meek, the sufferers, the sinful, the repentant, the hopeless, the lost, the lonely, the world-weary – they will be raised up by Him. Simeon was one of them. He was a man always living on the promised hope that he would not die in peace until somehow, sometime, some way, he would see the Lord's Christ with his own eyes.

That peace gave a song that we still sing:

“Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation” (vv 29–30).

Someday we'll sing that song perfectly and forever. Because of the Child presented in the temple this day.

Then, as we consider Anna, was one of the world-weary ones. In her eighty-four years, she had seen it all, including the death of her husband:

- She lived in a time when her country was occupied by Roman soldiers.
- Political corruption was rampant, led by rulers who came and went – after bleeding their people.
- There was unfair taxation that fell heavily on the poor.
- And even the temple where she took refuge knew greedy priests and faithless teachers.

Yet in the midst of this, was Anna – faithful, loyal, fasting and praying, and waiting – until *this* day, until *this* Child came to the temple. We hear from our text:

“And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (v 38).

Like those crazy shepherds we heard at Bethlehem forty days ago, Anna could not stop speaking of God's great mercy in the Child Who changed the world.

II. How does this Child change the world? He fulfills the Law on our behalf. Every last detail of all that God commanded and demanded is completed in Him. For this reason, He is brought to the temple, as Mary came to the temple for her *“purification according to the Law of Moses”* (v 22).

Yes, God had declared that women after giving birth had to offer a sacrifice. In the case of a poor family, two turtledoves or two young pigeons were to be brought.

But this sacrifice wasn't required to pay for some sin in the mother or because childbirth itself created some kind of guilt. Instead, it reminded that the sin of Adam and Eve was always being passed down to the next generation. There was no escaping it. And sin always requires a sacrifice.

Yet, there was one exception, One Who entered the world by birth without inheriting sin. You see, this very Child was without sin, because no human father passed it down to Him. Rather He was “*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.*”

And that was God’s perfect plan:

- So that Christ could fulfill the Law for those who did enter the world thoroughly corrupted in sin: *you and me.*
- Mary’s purification was a picture of the purifying we needed. Without it, we would be lost forever.
- Thus, Jesus is presented in the temple as our substitute so that we would be purified.

Therefore, in those moments when we feel, like Anna, world-weary, as if everything around us is out of control. We can cling in faith, as she did, to the promise that God isn’t only still ruling the universe, but very present right here where we are – in our little piece of the world. When He may be our only source of comfort.

Like Simeon:

- Our eyes also are opened to see Him – even in the worst of times.
- In Jesus’ weakness – here as the forty-day-old baby – we see our salvation.
- In our weakness – when we are helpless as a baby – we have the Lord’s salvation.

In our text today, the Light of the world doesn’t come as a lightning bolt, but as the tender light of Mary’s little Son.

It’s true, He doesn’t stay little. But here already as we see Jesus, the little One, we see what He has come to do. Not only will He keep all the Law perfectly in your place. But He will also provide the payment, the atonement, the redemption price, that covers all your sin so that you can come to His place – life everlasting.

Conclusion: Therefore, dear friends in Christ, because of this Child in our Baptism identity is why who we are today – forty days after Christmas:

- We are now Simeon, ready to depart in peace.
- We are now Anna, speaking to one another what God has done.
- We are Mary, a sword piercing our hearts, until the day that our eyes are opened for good, to see the Lord’s salvation, to dwell forever in His peace.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!