

GRACE CHURCH
feast of the PRESENTATION of CHRIST

Honesdale, PA
2 February 2020

Malachi 3: 1-4
Psalm 84
Hebrews 2: 14-18
Luke 2: 22-40

FULFILLING ALL THINGS RIGHT

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You want to tick off God?
Tell Him, “No!”
Didn’t work for Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist,
and now just a chapter later in Luke’s Gospel,
Simeon finds out the hard way.
Just 2 chapters in.
Maybe it is Luke who has issues with God!

Round about 250 BCE - that is, before the Birth of Christ -
70 Greek Jews were brought to the famed Library of Alexandria, Egypt,
the world’s single greatest archive of knowledge
as every book in the known world was copied on papyrus
and housed in the Library.

At the request of Greek Emperor Ptolemy II, even the Hebrew Scripture,
should be included.

So Simeon was brought to Egypt with 71 other Hebrew scholars,
translating God’s word into what is now known as the Septuagint,
the Bible that would have been known, and quoted in the NT.

When Jesus quotes the OT, it’s not quite the same as we just heard.

Each Jewish scholar was given a certain portion of Scripture to translate.

Simeon was translating the portion of Isaiah’s prophecy with the words,
“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son” (Is 7:14)

He thought that if the Greeks read that, they would laugh at the Jews,
and not come to believe in the Almighty God,
so he took his quill and corrected the text to read, ‘young woman.’

Poof! An angel appears grabs his hand, and says,
“You will write what God has said!”

Simeon trembles and takes another sheaf of papyrus.

“And because you have been so brazen against God,
you shall see these words fulfilled.

Death will not be yours until you behold the Christ of God,
born of a pure and spotless Virgin!”

Poof. Angel disappears.

Thus, 250 years later - Simeon was, as Luke describes, an old man -
we have that same Simeon back home in Jerusalem
hanging around the Temple Mount,
prayerfully anticipating fulfillment – fulfillment *and* rest.
Thus the Song of Simeon we use at Evening Prayer and Compline -
makes sense at the end of our day:
“Lord, now you set your servant free to go as you promised.
For these eyes of mine have seen your Salvation.”

There’s a bit of ancient history - or at least some legend -
and now some Scriptural background to today’s story.

Why is Joseph bringing Mary and the baby to Jerusalem?

According to Biblical Law, specified in the OT book of Leviticus,

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying... If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean... ⁴ Her time of blood purification shall be 33 days; she shall not touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are completed. ⁶ When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering... ⁸ If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf, and she shall be clean.

There are at least two things to note here,

ignoring that a woman giving birth required a sin offering:

first. Joseph was a poor man,

as Luke records they brought only 2 small birds for the offering

and secondly, that they were doing what God required.

Years later, Jesus will say the same thing to John the Baptist

when his cousin wishes not to baptize Jesus.

As I noted a few weeks ago, Jesus says to the Baptist:

“It is a good thing, John, that we fulfill all righteousness.”

Scholars suggest that not many people in the first century

observed the Laws of Moses, fulfilling righteousness.

Much like today.

And you know me, I don’t go by the letter of the Law.

I take the Bible seriously, not literally.

I like my lobster and pork with sauerkraut!

But I do understand what is behind the strictures of the Law

for healthy living -

after all, a dying or dead priest is no good to any one!

And yet, there are certain prescribed, recommended, suggested,
rituals which even this lively priest wish others would engage.

As I say, our motto in the Episcopal Church is:

“All may; none must; some should.”

I think all **should**. But that’s just me.

I get paid for encouraging you to do the Churchy things.

There’s Baptism - as some [*cinge*] say, getting their daughter ‘done.’

Yes, I hear that all too often.

God had them done at birth, didn’t He?

And there’s Communion; and Confirmation.

For some, there is Marriage and Ordination.

There is Commitment to Christian Service.

Reconciliation of a Penitent.

All righteous acts including in our Book of Common Prayer -
that red thing in the pews with the cross on the front.

“All may; none must;
some - maybe all - should.”

And that’s just some of the things in the Book of Common Prayer.

The only reason we don’t use that red book each week,
is that it is easier for guests and visitors, and maybe even you,
to have everything for the service printed in a leaflet.

Besides the Book of Common Prayer and its current supplements,
there is the B.O.S. - The “Book of Occasional Services” -
or as we said in seminary - “The Book of Spells”.

Where I got the Candlemas Procession for today.

There are things like The Blessing of Homes;

Blessing of a Pregnant Woman;

celebrating the Anniversary of a Marriage;

The Stations of the Cross,

and so much more.

“All may; none must; some should.” and I wish all would.

Come to Stations of the Cross on Fridays during Lent.

Celebrate the Anniversary of a Marriage -

Sue and I will honor our 40th anniversary in August -

if she will have me again after all she’s been through!

Let me come and bless your new - or old - home.

Scripture records that Simeon was a righteous man,

but that may have come after many, many long years.

We’re not sure about him at the young age of 70.

But he did discover, the hard way, not to tick off God!

Yet look at his ending.

+ 4 +

Who would not like to see Jesus at the end,
to hold the life of salvation in your hands,
and look upon the face of God?
Simeon may have thought at first that he was in deep trouble
when the angel upbraided him
and cursed him to walk the earth for 250 years
not knowing who or where he was looking.
And yet each step of his journey towards blessed rest,
he must have pondered the promise given him.

It is a matter of allowing God to be a part of all our lives.
Letting God in, more so than coming ourselves to God's Temple,
Inviting God into the temples of our lives.
There is a hymn I wish I had picked for today, #694,zz
from a pre-Reformation Anglican primer of the faith,
which I think expresses this sentiment well.

God be in my head, and in my understanding.
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking.
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking.
God be in my heart, and in my thinking.

and with Simeon we pray,
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

Sarum, 1514

AMEN

CHILDREN'S SERMON

TRUE or FALSE

two cards for each child: True False

Here is a set of True and False cards for each of you.

Because I have a quiz.

Now there's no failing, so don't worry.

When I ask a question, you raise your card either True or False.

Here we go.

- + Jesus's home was in Bethlehem.
- + A young girl can get pregnant and have a baby.
- + Jesus was baptized when he was a baby.
- + You can live to be 300 years old and see Jesus.
- + Jesus was born in Bethlehem.
- + The Temple in Jerusalem is the holiest place in the whole world.
- + Jesus' name was originally "Immanuel" or in Spanish, Manuel.
- + Today's story is the first time Jesus was brought to the Temple.

Do you think there are things that God tells us that are really crazy?

Some of those things are called prophecies.

And sometimes, people didn't believe them.

Like Mary believing Gabriel that she was going to have a baby.

Or that the Jesus, the King of Kings was to be born

in the little town of Bethlehem - not in the capital of Jerusalem.

Or that Simeon should write what God told him,

no matter what the people would think,

and that he would live for 300 years to see Jesus born.

But they came to believe.

and came to be blessed.

We can, too.

Let's pray:

Jesus, sometimes it is hard for us to believe what we read in the Bible, or things you tell us in our hearts. Yet like Mary, and Zechariah, and Simeon, help us to believe what you say, and live in faith, hope and joy. AMEN.