



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 28 JANUARY 2024- Presentation of Christ

COLLECT

Almighty and ever-living God,
clothed in majesty, whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple,
in substance of our flesh:
grant that we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts,
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Malachi 3. 1-5

The Coming Messenger

3 See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. **2** But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; **3** he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. ^[a] **4** Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

5 Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

Luke 2: 22-40

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon;^[a] this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.^[b] ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon^[c] came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon^[d] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant^[e] in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon^[f] blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna^[g] the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child^[h] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

A reflection from Hannah....

This week's reading, from the book of Malachi (one of the minor prophets) is almost the final word in the Old Testament. In our Bibles there may just be one thin, crispy page to separate these words from the Gospel of Mark- the opening lines of the New Testament. But the actual space between the two books is about 400 years. As the promises proclaimed in Malachi are left hanging in the air- in all their mystery, splendour and terror, the Hebrew people entered the vast silence of a kind of night-time that spanned centuries as they waited for the coming messenger.

And waiting is a work- it isn't a passive or paused thing. It's not like being put into stasis (as often conveniently happens in sci-fi dramas to move the plot on!). No, it's a time of watching and reflecting and unsteady as we take time to consider what it is we are waiting for; the shape it has, the signs of its arrival, the consequences for us.

Throughout Christmastide we are invited to notice that relationship between darkness and light- to notice that in the night-time, in the yearning, in the communal desolation that the Hebrew people endured, God's light, love, revelation and majesty can, quite suddenly, break through. It happened to the shepherds out on the hillside; it happened to the boy Samuel in the liminal drowsiness of nighttime; it happened to Nicodemus as he visited Christ. And when it happens, everything changes.

So as we gather to celebrate Candlemas, we notice the transforming power of Christ who, as a tiny baby, was the fulfilment of all that waiting for the quirky community who had made the temple their home. His presence changed everything for Simeon and for Anna- but it also changed everything for Mary and Joseph because they too learned something new about Emmanuel. It was, for them all, both revelation and mystery, both joy and foreboding. A complex of profile emotions, but undoubtedly (as is implied by Simeon's expression of completeness- 'now you are dismissing your servant in peace') all that they had ever longed for- the simple fact of the presence of Jesus makes everything else melt away.

As Christmas draws to an end and the light quite literally grows, perhaps we have spent the dark days and long nights contemplating our own longings. As we once again receive the gift of Emmanuel- God with us- and turn to face the world before us, may we too recognise the light of Christ's presence and its transforming power, in ourselves and in others. We, like the silver and the soap described by Malachi, are always a work in progress- may it be God who works in us to grow the things of the kingdom in our communities- justice, mercy and peace.