

## 27<sup>th</sup> December 2020 10 am The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Service led by Emma Latham, Talk by Rob Latham, Prayers by Pam Stote,

Reading by Hamish Blair

*This transcript is only of the reading and the talk*

**Reading: Luke 2:22-40 [NIVUK 2011]**

### **Jesus presented in the temple**

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons’.

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.’

33 The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.

38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

### **Talk**

[Emma Latham:]

Now Rob is going to come and talk to us. So we'll just have a prayer.

Heavenly Father, as Rob comes to talk to us this morning, I pray, Lord, that by Your Holy Spirit You will inspire him, that You will speak through him, that the message that he speaks will resonate with us and in our hearts. Father God, just bless him now we pray, in Jesus' Name.

[Rob:] Amen.

At Christmas when I was a child, we opened our presents in our parents’ bedroom, lit by a fire, with great excitement. And then the other exciting part about Christmas was there were always two Christmas parties, either on Christmas Day

we would go to my uncle's house and share in one Christmas party, and then the following day on Boxing Day they would come to us. And we'd have two Christmas parties on successive days. And the following year it would work the opposite way round: they would come to us on Christmas Day and we would go to them on Boxing Day. And I remember having a fantastic time. We'd play party games of all sorts of shapes and sizes suitable for children. We wouldn't watch the television – it wouldn't be on at all. We played games like 'Mrs Jones is dead', 'blind man's buff', 'squeak piggy squeak'. And the one that I loved and hated in equal terms was the one that my dad seemed to enjoy particularly, called 'a-hunting we will go'. It was a bit like a barn dance, but hey, it was a fabulous, wonderful time. And that was Christmas. That was it: presents on Christmas Day, two parties on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. In fact, the reason why I mentioned my uncle Peter was because I vividly remember him saying to me one time on Boxing Day evening, towards going-home time for us, I presume we were at his house. And he said, "Well, that's Christmas over for this year." So, for my early childhood, well, throughout my childhood, Christmas was really Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

But actually, there's a whole lot more to Christmas than all of that. It was only really as an adult, and as I got deeper and deeper into my own faith, and then to be ordained, that I began to discover the full richness of Christmas: there are twelve days of Christmas. Last year, again before lockdown, I didn't meet with my sister and her family until into the new year. But we were still celebrating Christmas and wishing each other a Happy Christmas at the same time. And the processes of being ordained has led me into all sorts of other experiences, that actually, if we take away the idea of just celebrating the birth of Jesus and seeing in a bigger context of the incarnation, there's so much more that we add into that.

For instance, the season of Advent becomes much more special, not just because we're preparing for the birth of Jesus but because we're preparing for the return of Jesus, which will kind-of connect with something I shall be saying later. And then of course, we take down our decorations on Twelfth Night, the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, only to begin another season called Epiphany, in which we come to know who this Incarnate Man is. And that's a different way of looking at how Jesus comes into the world, the public announcement of who He is, at His baptism by John, the coming of the Wise Men, which are not really part of the Christmas story, and shouldn't be part of our crib scene until Epiphany. And here they are in our house, travelling on their journey to the Christmas scene. So a whole lot more. And the problem is, as well, I sometimes think that some of the aspects of that actually did pertain to the birth of Jesus are easily missed. How many Nativity plays have we seen that includes a scene about the circumcision of Jesus? And the role played by a priest that would go snip snip, in order to do that process, which would make Jesus a true Jewish boy.



And then at the other end of the spectrum, the end of the incarnation season is marked by the presentation of Jesus Christ, which Hamish read for us in our reading just a moment ago. And here we see Jesus being presented as the firstborn son of Mary, because it was required by the Jewish Law, required in order for Him to be redeemed, bought back for God, by the sacrifice of the lamb. So let's just think what the presentation is about. In order to understand it properly, we need to go back into the history of the Jewish faith, way back to the Exodus story. In the Exodus, the crucial moment comes when the Angel of Death will pass over the land of Egypt. We say pass over, but he will actually travel through the land of Egypt. The Angel of Death seeks out the firstborn son of all who is there. But Israelites, because this is an act of God, they are preserved and their firstborn sons are preserved by them taking a lamb, slaughtering it, and then daubing the blood of the lamb on the lintels and doorposts of their homes. So when the Angel of Death comes to Egypt, it passes

over them, it ignores them, it leaves alone the houses that are protected by the blood of the lamb.

And from that time onwards, the firstborn son in every Jewish family had to be redeemed, that is, purchased back, bought back. A price had to be paid for Him, so that he could be as a glory to God. The usual sacrifice that was to be offered was an unblemished lamb. But when we come to Mary and Joseph bringing in Jesus for this custom, they aren't able to afford that. And so the offering of the poor people is given instead, two doves or two young pigeons. So this clearly indicates that Mary and Joseph, having moved down to Bethlehem for the census, are now still in a state of poverty. Presumably Joseph is unable to work, and they have to rely on the pittance that they have available to buy the poor sacrifice, but nevertheless Jesus, in that sense, is redeemed.

Of course there's other things that have to be done. It's 40 days after birth that the mother of the newborn child has to present herself, to show that her confinement is complete and the purification ceremony is offered for her. But the key thing is that Jesus is brought, just like one of us, to be offered before the Lord, and the sacrifices are offered.

It's interesting isn't it? Andrew on Christmas Day was stressing the importance of seeing God's DNA that this is God incarnate, the Son of God, carrying the mark of God right from the very beginning. But, in a sense, because the mystery of Jesus is that He is both fully God and fully man, and from that perspective, the Presentation marks Him out as simply as any other Jewish child of that time, that the sacrifice has to be offered. It's always a little bit of a mystery isn't it, that? Why Jesus has to be treated in exactly the same way, even though He is the divine sinless Son of God? You know, that He is God incarnate. In a sense, He's been bought back for God without the necessity of it because there's nothing that can hold on Him. But like so often through the Scriptures, it's important for Jesus to act and show and be treated just like any one of us, or, particularly in this instance, like any Jewish child at the time.

So, the other problem about focusing too much on the Christmas story is that we sometimes obscure the connections that kind-of lead on from here. Of course, we always have to stress the child in the manger is not just there as a pretty baby to celebrate a happy event. But the significance of this is taken on in through His human life, presented to us as a Child who will redeem Himself and all people in the world, offering Himself upon a Cross. And we even get to the point when we get all the way back to Advent, because the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ sits in Heaven, waiting for His second Advent, waiting for His return. And instead of waiting for Christmas, in a sense, we have this continuous Advent, that we are living in a time when we're waiting to rejoice and be glad that at the end of all things that Jesus will return to bring everything under His feet.

But you know there's something else that we just need to add in to this story of the Presentation, to help us make this significance clear to us and understandable. So, just like in His baptism, where Jesus doesn't want to kind-of show Himself to be any different to any other person, and so submits to a baptism of forgiveness of sin, even though He is the Sinless One, it is in a sense that Jesus is lifted up for us as a representative of us. You see this all points to the significance of how the Cross takes its place in the Christmas story. Because Jesus, we're told by Paul, born into this world, became sin, though He knew no sin, in order that we might become the righteousness of God<sup>1</sup>. And in this Christmas story we have a picture of that offering to God of that sinless Man, of that sinless Child, not simply for the rite of the ritual to be done on His behalf, but actually as a representative of us, that even in His infancy Jesus is being presented as the Person, as the Child in this instance, but as the Person, in whom we will find our redemption, and our release from all the sin and wrongdoing.

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1 2 Corinthians 5:21

You know, I made a wonderful discovery in preparing for an Advent service for Knights Meadow this year: the nature of joy. We wish each other, don't we, a Happy Christmas. We say it loud and long. We've surely said it over and over again. But happiness is something that is really rather dependent on other people or the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Happiness is a kind of a one-dimensional word because it depends on how we respond to the things around us and how content we feel. But joy is a much deeper and greater thing. I discovered that the Greek word for joy is *chara* [χαρά], and that the Greek word for grace is *charis* [χάρις]. I'm no Greek scholar. In fact, when I was at theological college I had to have asked my bishop if he'd let me off my Greek lessons because I wasn't getting anywhere very quickly with them, which I'm thankful he did. But *chara* and *charis* must surely be from the same root. And you know, joy is a response to grace. It's the exuberant feelings of overwhelming rejoicing and thankfulness because we have been given grace. Jesus comes into the world as God's gift of grace to us.

Grace? What does that mean? Do you understand the word? Best understood I think, with the words **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**, because in the Cross, and even in the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on His 40th day of life, He is being lifted up in **GRACE** for us and our response is surely a joy that knows no bound, a joy that is excited and exuberant because the love of God is shown to us in this way. It gives us a full comprehension of what Christmas, Epiphany, Advent and indeed the whole of the life of Jesus is about. And it is that joy that we celebrate, that our redemption has come, that Jesus Christ, the answer to the age-old solution of what our problem is, our fault of sin and wrongdoing, is being taken away from us, in order that we might follow Him.

Okay. Here's a final thought. We could say that this is cheap grace, because it costs us nothing, But we'd be wrong, wouldn't we, if we said that. In reality, though, we're not asked to die and be put to death for our own sin because Jesus frees us from that. It does cost us our life, it costs us everything, because we're asked to walk in the way, not of our own choosing, but of the choosing of God. But if we walk in that way, and we trust God for everything, then we know in us, the light, the life and the glory of God will make His home in us, because the Holy Spirit dwelling in us will bring us not less life by the giving of our life, but more: an abundant life, pressed down and overflowing<sup>2</sup>. In this picture of the Presentation, I'm asking you to be presented with Jesus in your hearts and minds before the living God, to receive anew His gift of life, and the blessings of His peace. Let us pray.

Father, we place ourselves again into Your hands this Christmas. May we be presented before you like Jesus with Jesus, under the power of Jesus. So that through His redeeming love, we may be acceptable to You and be filled with Your grace and glory and Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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