

31/01/2023 Luke 2:22-40 1 Christmas

At Christmas we heard the great prologue of John's Gospel

- As part of that prologue we heard these words about Jesus:
- **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.** John 1:5
- The picture is of light and darkness as opposing forces
- But the darkness not being able to extinguish the light.

Today I'm proclaiming Good News from the Scriptures:

- The light of Christ, which shone from his infancy,
- Shines in our lives, and we experience the power of his light
- To overcome the darkness of sin and death
- As we receive his body and blood even today
- In the Sacrament of the Altar.
- It is Christ with us who strengthens us
- To stand fast in the face of any opposition
- And to persevere in the life of faith that shines in deeds of love.

Let's hear how the text starts:

- **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 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), 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.'**
- Jesus has been born in Bethlehem –
- We have heard of the angels and the shepherds
- And of Mary pondering all the things said about her son.
- Now we hear of Jesus being born as one *under the law*:
- Just before our reading we hear that Jesus was circumcised
- And today we hear that the other rituals prescribed by the law
- Are done for Jesus
- One thing to note: Jesus' parents give the stated sacrifice

- But the lesser one, indicating their poverty:
- Jesus parents are righteous, but not wealthy
- And this is worth thinking about when it comes to life with God:
- Wealth is not a simple indicator of God's approval
- In fact we hear clear warnings regarding wealth
- In Jesus' teaching.

Listen to how the reading goes on:

- **Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.**
- One of the great themes of Advent is comfort –
- The consolation that God would give his people.
- It's in Isaiah 40, and we sang of this comfort in our services
- (It's also well known from Handel's *Messiah*)
- Simeon, like Mary and Joseph, was righteous and devout
- He was not someone who did the bare minimum,
- But lived out his faith joyfully.
- He had what we could call a private revelation
- That he would not die before he had seen David's Son -
- The one who would reign as the promised Messiah -
- And the Spirit leads Simeon to Christ
- Note: this is what the Spirit does: *leads us to Christ*:
- Think even of the explanation of the third article of the creed
- In the Small Catechism: ***the Holy Spirit has called me to Jesus...***

So this is what we read:

- **Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,**

- **‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.’**
- Let’s picture this: Simeon, who it is reasonable to imagine is old
- Holds the infant Christ in his arms
- Jesus, who is under the law, is the light that consoles
- And Simeon sings the song that we know as the Nunc dimittis

Do the words sound familiar to you?

- We regularly sing them after we have received communion
- We understand that in receiving Christ’s body and blood
- For the forgiveness of sins
- We are receiving consolation from God
- And that the light of Christ shines in our lives

What happens next strikes an ominous note:

- **And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’**
- The blessing does not mean everything will be easy:
- *Mary’s Son will be opposed:*
- Jesus, by his presence, by his words and actions
- Will reveal what is going on inside human hearts:
- He will be opposed: This is worth thinking about:
- On the one hand we bear Christ in our lives
- But this does not necessarily make things easy:
- We human beings do naturally oppose Christ:
- Not only his teaching, but also who he is

- And when Simeon says to Mary
- **and a sword will pierce your own soul too.**
- These words are also for us: so that we are not dismayed
- For any opposition we face for bearing Jesus' name.

The narrative of Jesus at the temple is not over

- We hear these words: **There was also a prophet, Anna 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, 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. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.**
- Again we have a picture of devotion: Anna is in the temple
- The place of the gracious presence of God
- And within the temple she speaks of the child Jesus
- To all those who seek what the Lord has to give: redemption
- This signals how we too are to receive Christ
- As the one who buys us out of slavery to sin
- And frees us to live in the light of God.

Here's how our reading ends: **When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.**

- Jesus was already the Son of God:
- He didn't need to grow in who he was.
- But he grew towards the goal
- Of his suffering, death, and resurrection.
- It is Christ who gives us his light, a light stronger than darkness
- So, let us today depart in peace
- Christ is with us so that we may persevere
- On the path of faith that leads to the eternal light of God.