

## **In Nomine Iesu**

### **The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany (Presentation) Luke 2:22-40 – Must Jerusalem’s temple be rebuilt?**

“And 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 male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.’

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘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 may be revealed.’ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years

from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 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. And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

Isaiah calls the temple the House of Prayer for all people. But despite Isaiah's moniker the temple segregates. It divides men from women, Jews from Gentiles, and priests from laity. The temple in which Our Lord was presented was not the temple of the Old Testament, the one built by Solomon according to Divine command. That had been desecrated and destroyed. The temple of the presentation, where Simeon sings his song, was the one built by the corrupt King Herod.

And yet, despite Herod's vanity and blatant politicking, the desecration of the temple by a Roman eagle, God sanctified it. He made it His own. The blood of animals was spilled there in the place of men's blood, as the wages for sins. The aroma was pleasing to God. He chose to dwell there on behalf of His people with His gracious, merciful presence.

Still, that Temple was no more permanent with its brick, stone, and mortar, its beams of cedar from Lebanon than the

portable tabernacle of Moses. The temple in which our Lord was presented and laid in Simeon's arms, in which as a 12-year-old boy He amazed the teachers, where He later preached and healed and baffled His vain enemies, and from which He drove out the money-changers, that temple was destroyed. It no longer exists. It has been gone now for 1,950 years. And even if, as some advocate, a temple like Herod's is rebuilt, God will not dwell there. That temple served its purpose. Now God has raised up for Himself a temple, which men did not build, but that men did tear down. He raised up that temple. Men will never tear down again the Temple that He raised on the third day. This living, eternal Temple is the only one that counts.

We do not need the Temples of Solomon and Herod. We have the greater Temple. He is older than those others, older even than Moses' Tabernacle, older than the sacrifice that clothed Adam and Eve as they were expelled from the garden. He is more durable, too. Those other places were only shadows of Him who has now come. They are fulfilled in Him who died, but who lives. The good they did they did by Him, by the power of His death and resurrection, and He is all that they were and more. He is the place of God's gracious presence. He is Immanuel, God with us, God as one of us for us. He is the Atonement and appeasement of God's wrath, the Passover Lamb that takes away not just the sins of those whose doors are marked, but the sins of the whole world. It is His Blood that is sprinkled upon us, distributed from the Chalice, which gives us faith, that makes us clean, that declares us righteous. He stands between us and God's perfect Law, our shield and protector. He is the seat of mercy, the House of Prayer for all people, who intercedes for His

beloved even while teaching them to pray. He is the consolation of Israel, the redemption of those who believe.

He is greater than all the types, all the symbols and foreshadowings, that went before Him. And He does not segregate. Unlike the man-built Temples, in Him, there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female. And in Him there are no laymen. All believers are priests of the order of Melchizedek, His own order. All who confess His Name are members of the royal family. They offer up the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and moved by their request He spares the world of His greater wrath. He is not bound to time or space, to real estate, but He bound Himself to the stuff of Mary's womb that He might bleed and die and rise again to recapture men for Himself. Now His humiliation is ended. As a Man, as Mary's Son, our Brother, He always and fully uses His Divine rights and attributes. As a Man, God dwells in the hearts of men, making them the temple of His Holy Spirit where His own loving Father is addressed by Grace as Our Father. As a Man, in the Flesh, He is present in bread and wine to join us to Himself in a sacramental union that defies our intellect but satisfies our faith.

So this is where God has called you to be: where He is, where He has said that He would be for you, by Grace. That doesn't mean that where He promises to be, here in His Word and in His Sacrament, is always a gushing, emotional high. Indeed, He certainly gives those times. And we give thanks for them when they come, and are glad in them. But ours is the life of faith, just as it was for Simeon and Anna. We should not imagine that we can understand their long lives of faith on the basis of what happened on just that one day, even though that one day was undoubtedly for both of them the high point of

their lives. There must have been other days of sorrow and disappointment, days of a monotonous sameness that we too know well. Dear friends, living by faith means believing in the Word of God and His promises, even when we feel cold inside, when we are full of self-pity, when our soul seems lost in a foggy, uncertain world, and our only emotion seems to be melancholy. Even then, we live by faith, we trust God's Word. In such desperate and painful, uncertain and fearful times, faith boldly says, "So what of that? Yes, I hurt. I am sad. But God's Word is still true. I'll believe in that! No matter what, I know that God is good, that God is true, that God is here for me as He has said that He would be, because Jesus died to set me free. That I believe!" So goes Grace. So goes Faith.

This is what the birth and death and resurrection of Christ Our Lord was for: It was for your eternal peace. Time is not without an end, and neither is your sorrow or your pain. It will not last. Christ lives. He is coming back. For now, while we wait, He is here for you in the places that He has promised to be: His Word, His Body and Blood, the Holy Absolution. Christ, the Firstborn, is presented here this very day, even as He was in Herod's Temple so long ago. He is presented for you, always, for you. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**