

# Scripture Study

Presentation of the Lord – Cycle A



## Opening prayer

Malachi 3:1-4

(Ps 24:7, 8 9, 10)

Hebrews 2:14-18

**Luke 2:22-40**

## Overview of the Gospel:

- Known originally as the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is a relatively ancient celebration. The Church at Jerusalem observed the feast as early as the first half of the fourth century, and likely earlier. The feast celebrates the presentation of Christ in the temple at Jerusalem on the 40th day after His birth.
- According to Jewish law, the firstborn male child belonged to God, and the parents had to redeem or "buy him back" on the 40th day after his birth, by offering a sacrifice of a lamb or, for the poor, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24). This was to be completed in the temple (thus the "presentation" of the child). On that same day, the mother would be ritually purified (thus the "purification").
- Mary and Joseph kept this law, even though, since Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Christ (CCC 499-501), she would not have had to go through ritual purification.
- Our Gospel reading for this feast stresses the holy family's strict obedience to the Law of Moses. Luke 2:21 also notes that "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived." Circumcision is a sign of the covenant between Abraham and God, a mark which designates that they belong to God's chosen people, a requirement of the law grounded in Genesis 17:12 (see also Leviticus 12:3; CCC 527).

## Questions:

- In the first reading, who is the Lord's messenger (verse 1)? Malachi (the name means "my messenger")? John the Baptist (see Matthew 11:10)? A second Elijah (Malachi 4:5)? What will he (they) do (see Isaiah 40:3-5)?
- In what sense is the fear of death a form of bondage for us (Hebrews 2:15)? Do you often think of your own death? When are such thoughts most likely to occur? What emotional reaction do they cause in you? What impact do such thoughts have on your faith in God?
- In the Gospel reading, what Mosaic laws are being fulfilled in the Presentation (Leviticus 12:1-8; Exodus 13:2, 12, 14)? How do these events foreshadow Jesus' mission?
- What impact would the startling predictions by Anna and Simeon have on all who were listening that day? On Mary and Joseph as they returned home (verses 33-39)?
- While it may be easy to see how Jesus might be "set for the rise of many" (verses 34-35), how might he be destined for their fall? In what ways has Jesus and his message been a stumbling block for you? How have you surmounted the problems?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 711, 529, 583, 695, 618, 149**

## Closing Prayer

**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!**

*When Christ came, he banished the devil from our hearts, in order to build in them a temple for himself. Let us therefore do what we can with his help, so that our evil deeds will not deface the temple.*

--St. Caesarius of Arles

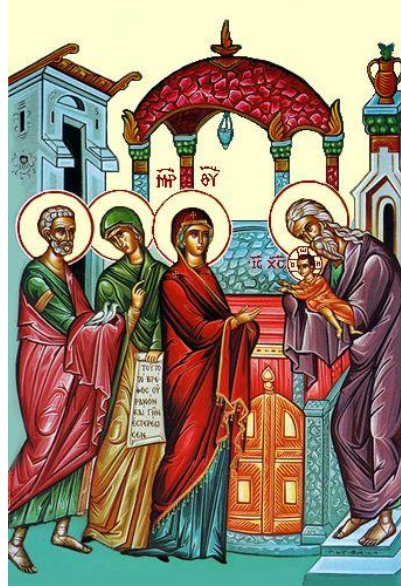
# "The favor of God was upon him"

**Scripture:** *Luke 2:22-40*

Meditation: Do you know the favor of the Lord? After Jesus' birth, Mary fulfills the Jewish rite of purification after childbirth. Since she could not afford the customary offering of a lamb, she gives instead two pigeons as an offering of the poor. This rite, along with circumcision and the redemption of the first-born point to the fact that children are gifts from God. Jesus was born in an ordinary home where there were no luxuries. Like all godly parents, Mary and Joseph raised their son in the fear and wisdom of God. He, in turn, was obedient to them and grew in wisdom and grace. The Lord's favor is with those who listen to his word with trust and obedience. Do you know the joy of submission to God? And do you seek to pass on the faith and to help the young grow in wisdom and maturity?

What is the significance of Simeon's encounter with the baby Jesus and his mother in the temple? Simeon was a just and devout man who was very much in tune with the Holy Spirit. He believed that the Lord would return to his temple and renew his chosen people. The Holy Spirit also revealed to him that the Messiah and King of Israel would also bring salvation to the Gentile nations. When Joseph and Mary presented the baby Jesus in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized this humble child of Bethlehem as the fulfillment of all the messianic prophecies, hopes, and prayers. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he prophesied that Jesus was to be "a revealing light to the Gentiles". The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of the Lord to those who are receptive and eager to receive him. Do you recognize the indwelling presence of the Lord with you?

Jesus is the new temple (John 1:14; 2:19-22). In the Old Testament God manifested his presence in the "pillar of cloud" by day and the "pillar of fire" by night as he led them through the wilderness. God's glory visibly



came to dwell over the ark and the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38). When the first temple was built in Jerusalem God's glory came to rest there (1 Kings 8). After the first temple was destroyed, Ezekiel saw God's glory leave it (Ezekiel 10). But God promised one day to fill it with even greater glory (Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 8-9). That promise is fulfilled when the "King of Glory" himself comes to his temple (Psalm 24:7-10; Malachi 3:1). Through Jesus' coming in the flesh and through his saving death, resurrection, and ascension we are made living temples of his Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Ask the Lord to renew your faith in the indwelling presence of his Spirit with you. And give him thanks and praise for coming to make his home with you.

Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph and he prophesied to Mary about the destiny of this child and the suffering she would undergo for his sake. There is a certain paradox for those blessed by the Lord. Mary was given the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. She received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. But her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples

that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away. Do you know the joy of a life fully surrendered to God with faith and trust?

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord's presence in the temple. Anna, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit. She was found daily in the temple, attending to the Lord in prayer and speaking prophetically to others about God's promise to send a redeemer. Supernatural hope grows with prayer and age! Anna was pre-eminently a woman of great hope and expectation that God would fulfill all his promises. She is a model of godliness to all believers as we advance in age. Advancing age and the disappointments of life can easily make us cynical and hopeless if we do not have our hope placed rightly. Anna's hope in God and his promises grew with age. She never ceased to worship God in faith and to pray with hope. Her hope and faith in God's promises fueled her indomitable zeal and fervor in prayer and service of God's people. What do you hope for? The hope which God places in our heart is the desire for the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness. How do we grow in hope? By placing our trust in the promises of Jesus Christ and relying not on our own strength, but on the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. Does your hope and fervor for God grow with age?

*"Lord Jesus, may we never cease to hope in you and to trust in your promises. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may always recognize your saving presence in our lives. Help us to point others to Christ and to be an example of faith and devotion as Simeon and Anna were to their generation."*

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