

The Feast of the Presentation, 2022
by the Rev. Jac Cherry
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SALVATION MAKING

Good morning friends, my comrades on Zoom, and my masked brothers and sisters in the church!

Lisa was on the rota to preach this morning but was called out of town at the last minute. When she needed someone to cover for her, I thought it would be a cinch – all preachers have old sermons on the miraculous catch of fish in their back pockets. That didn’t pan out; today we are observing Jesus’ Presentation in the Temple – a religious rite that occurred 6 weeks after the nativity.

In a way, Mary, too, was presented in the temple. The law of Moses required a ritual cleansing for all women after childbirth. New mothers must be purified before they can re-enter the temple. So, forty days after Jesus’ birth, Mary presented herself to the priests. And only after she was cleansed from the defilement of giving birth could she and Joseph present Jesus in the temple. The Feast of the Purification is also known as Candlemas, a tradition where churches hand out candles (or the people brought their own to church) to be blessed. The congregation would then process into the church holding their lighted candles, this perhaps representing Mary and Joseph carrying Jesus into the temple. For, as Simeon proclaims, Jesus is the light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.



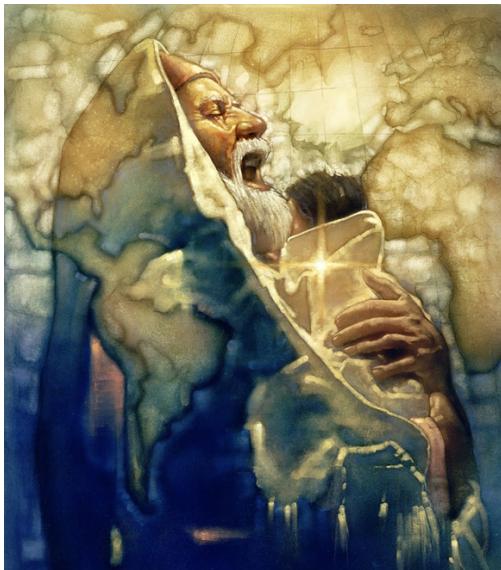
Duccio Presentation in the Temple 1308-11

In this holy convergence of rite and ritual, there’s not one word about fish. So, let’s talk about Simeon, and his song!

*“Lord, you now have set your servant free,
to go in peace as you have promised;
My eyes have seen the Savior, Christ the Lord,
prepared by you for all the world to see,
to shine on nations trapped in darkest night,
the glory of your people, and their light.*

Simeon’s song is so familiar that I can’t read the words without hearing the music of hymn #499. The Song of Simeon concludes Compline, a short bedtime prayer service recited or sung by faithful Christians around the world. His song is peaceful, like a lullaby, making it easy to forget the reality that in asking God to be set free, Simeon is asking to die. Indeed, wouldn’t we all prefer to sleep in the hope of salvation and glory?

Simeon was faithful and stubborn, and he had a robust relationship with the Holy Spirit. Some years earlier, the Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't die without first seeing the long-awaited Messiah. Simeon took this revelation to heart. Year after year he waited and prayed; waited and watched for the coming Savior. His body aged, but his heart wasn't about to stop until God's promise had been fulfilled. And finally, after he had waited his whole life, the Holy Spirit beckoned Simeon to the temple, the same day a young Jewish family, obedient to the Law of Moses, arrived at the temple to present their infant son to the priests.



Like John in Elizabeth's womb, Simeon's heart leapt at the sight of the 6-week-old baby. And he swept him up in his arms proclaiming ecstatically the words of exultation and reassurance we still sing today –

*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.*

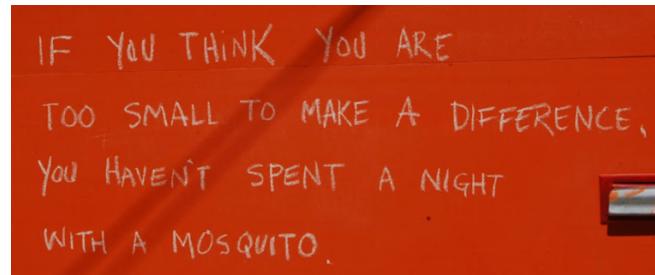
In the baby Jesus, Simeon saw what he had been waiting his entire life to see, the light of God's salvation, the fulfillment of God's promise to his people Israel.

Consider this straightforward translation:

*Lord God, I have seen the Savior, the Messiah,
You have kept your promise, and that is enough for me.
I don't need to watch him grow up to perform miracles;
I don't need to hear his teachings or witness his healings;
I don't want to see his death and resurrection;
And I don't need to see him pull in all of those fish.
God, please release me now; let me die in peace.*

Understand, Simeon did not say he watched salvation happen. Rather, he is saying he has seen the One who will make salvation possible. The onus isn't only on Jesus – we have a part to play in salvation making, too. And so many in this congregation are embracing their role.

JAN ADAMS



In her blog, [Happening Here](#) (that she's faithfully kept for 20 years), Jan writes:

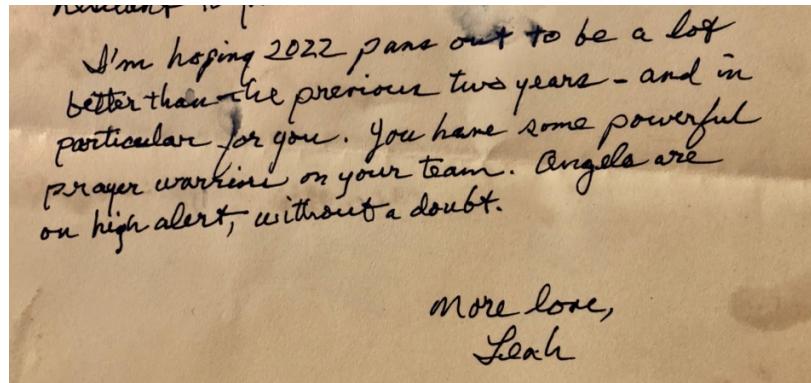
When times are bleak -- when country and planet sink under the barely restrained sway of greed, raw power, and fear -- it's time to restate what matters.

I write here to preserve and kindle hope for a national and global turn toward multi-racial, economically egalitarian, gender non-constricting, woman affirming, and peace choosing democracy that preserves the habitability of earth for all.

There's a big order -- but what else is there to do but struggle for this? Not much.

I am not an optimist, but I refuse to allow myself to wallow within the easy bias that everything is going to always be awful. Good also happens; love lives too.

LEAH FORBES



And our dear Leah continues to light up the lives of others with her old-fashioned letters, and sheer kindness. Just last week she sent me a thank you note for simply reaching out to her when Cecil died. I'm sure Leah has no idea how meaningful this was for me -- a timely reminder of the strong bonds and love we share for one another in this community. Leah writes:

*You have some powerful prayer warriors on your team.
Angels are on high alert, without a doubt.*

We are a community of (more) love that prays ferociously for one another; the angels on high alert are the members of this community.

In her note, Leah enclosed a New Yorker cartoon on parenting. The timing was impeccable because the next morning I had the following text exchange with Felix.

FELIX FREEMAN-CHERRY

i left an important paper in the bathroom and now there is someone crying in the bathroom and i need my paper

Oh no. Ask if they need help

no lmfao

if i was crying in the bathroom the last thing i would want is some random person talking to me

Say, this is Felix, is there anything I can do for you.

are u dumb

i dont know who they are

this is high school jac it doesn't work like that

What if it's the guy who wants to kill himself.

If they're ok?

ppl have their moments

its not u weirdo

Noob, even in high school it's okay to let a stranger know you care about them.

That was the end of the conversation. I can only assume the person in the bathroom eventually came out.

This exchange with Felix illustrates a common dilemma – as Christians navigating the world, how do we decide when to intervene when someone is in distress? We encounter people in need every day. And Felix is right, people have their moments. The truth is, very few of us are guided by the Holy Spirit like Simeon. And it's easier to turn up the iPod and walk on by.

In the temple, Simeon came face-to-face with his long-awaited Jesus. The One who would make salvation possible, and he was set free. I wonder, what are you willing to wait your whole life for? Remember, waiting isn't passive; we have a part to play in salvation making, too. It's not too late to start now.

Felix's other mother, Professor Elizabeth Freeman who has written extensively on temporality, says:

'Now is not empty: it contains the possibilities of what we could not do then, and the futures that might come about if we realize those possibilities.'

Amen.