

The Presentation of the Lord

Fr. Samuel Springuel

2 February, 2025

1st Reading Malachi 3:1–4

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 24:7,8,9,10

2nd Reading Hebrews 2:14–18

Gospel Luke 2:22–40

If you talked to me in October or even early November, you would think that I hate Christmas music. At that time of year I'm constantly telling people to turn it off. It's too early to be listening to Christmas music. It's being played by commercial interests trying to encourage over-consumption. The music is a not-so-subliminal reminder that Christmas is coming. Suddenly every shopping trip is an opportunity to find the "perfect gift," which of course you must buy now because it's on sale. Christmas music, in my opinion, should not be played before the 1st Sunday of Advent.

The thing is, I was still listening to Christmas music this past week. I was listening to it as I prepared this homily. It's not that I don't like Christmas music, but rather that I think it should be listened to in its proper season. And while that proper season doesn't start in October, it most decidedly does extend until today, even if most of the world has forgotten and moved on to the next sales season: Valentine's Day.

At least in Luke's Gospel, which is the one we hear today, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple forms the close of the infancy narrative. Luke has recounted several great events by which Jesus's life and ministry are foreshadowed even before he was born. It started with the announcement of the birth of John, the man who would be the "voice crying out in the wilderness." At the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel foretold that Mary would bear Jesus, the Son of the Most High and heir to the throne of David. We saw the lives of these two children intersect in the Visitation when their mothers, one old and barren, past child-bearing years, and one young and unmarried, still a virgin who has no knowledge of a man, they meet and celebrate their respective pregnancies. Then they separated again and we saw their respective births, the first a cause for prophesy, foreshadowing his own prophetic role, the other accompanied by the choirs of angels, but taking place in a lowly stable and witnessed only by shepherds, embodying the contradiction of the King of Kings who came to be the Suffering Servant.

Interspersed with these events we place the events of Matthew's gospel, and much has been written and debated about how their respective timelines should be reconciled, but at least liturgically, the Church positions Luke's account of the Presentation as the closing act. With our celebration today, Christmas, the

celebration of the Birth of Christ, is officially over. If you haven't sent out your cards yet, you are officially too late.

And what happens on this last day of Christmas? Christ himself comes to the Temple. On the surface, it doesn't seem like a very significant event. It is not without meaning, showing Christ fulfilling all the precepts of the Law in regards to his birth, but there are no miracles here, no angelic messengers, no heavenly choirs. Just a couple of old people, who spend most of their time in the Temple anyway, meeting a child.

But we should recall what the Temple is: it is the place of encounter with God. To the ancient Jews the Temple was where they could find the presence of God and where they could interact with it through the sacrificial system set out in the Law given to them by God himself. It was here that they came at least a few times a year to be in God's presence, to worship him and renew their devotion. In coming to the Temple, Christ is reciprocating that action, making manifest who he is by what he does: God made manifest in the flesh has come to meet His people in the place where they go to meet their God.

Simeon and Anna then, are the first of his people to recognize this. They are us, as we desire to be if not as we actually are some of the time. They have faithfully come to the Temple, year after year, to encounter their God. And here, on this day, their perseverance is rewarded: God has come to them.

When he imagined God coming into his Temple, the psalmist saw the Temple as being too small to contain the Lord. "O gates, lift high your lintels; grow higher, ancient doors!" He commanded, become bigger, open wider than you have ever opened before. Make room for the King of Glory. And yet Simeon and Anna encounter their God in a little child, a baby just 40 days old who could have physically passed through a window, let alone a gate designed to admit thousands of people each day. This hardly seems like a Temple expanding presence.

And yet we know God's Temple did expand. Not physically, that building stayed as it was until destroyed by the Romans some 70 years later. But the place of encounter with God got bigger. Jesus, God himself, took that place of encounter out into the wider world. Through him, God encountered his people on the banks of the River Jordan, at a wedding in small town, in a fishing village on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Simeon and Anna encountered God in the Temple, where they knew they could because they believed in God's promises. Countless others encountered Jesus just where they were, where they had no prior expectation of finding God. Even those who would have never come to the Temple, who would have never been welcomed in the Temple: sinners, Samaritans, Canaanites, Greeks, gentiles. Jesus came to the Temple to meet his people and found some missing. So he went out and met them. And when his time on Earth came to its conclusion, he directed his disciples to do the same. He founded a Church and tasked it with preaching the good news to all creatures.

Today we end the Christmas season with the Presentation, the Encounter in the Eastern Churches. Christmas is done, practically forgotten by the rest of the world for the next few months. But that encounter, it is our commission. Christ came to meet us not simply to smile at us and give us a pat on the back. We encounter Christ so that others might encounter Christ through us. We have come to God's temple. This church, this community of people. We are part of the Temple of God: living stones built by the Spirit. It is in us that the encounter with God can take place. It is incumbent on us to take God out to

meet his people, all the nations, all creatures. We have come here to encounter God in the Word we have heard, the Eucharist we will consume, and the people with whom we celebrate. Do not let that encounter go to naught. Be like Anna and speak about the child to all who will listen.