

CANDLEMAS-PURIFICATION OF MARY-PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD -- LUKE 2:22-40

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

²² 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 ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." ³⁶ 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, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ 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. Thus far our text.

Waiting – we’re all familiar with it. At the same time, we all hate it. We echo the proverbial phrase and pray for patience, but we want it right now! Since this day in the church year, celebrating the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of the Baby Jesus in the Temple, also coincides with a celebration called Candlemas, let’s talk about this a little bit. In the early church, they would often wait until 40 days after Christmas to take down the Christmas decorations, including the extra candles – thus the name. It’s the formal ending of the Great Season of Christmas; the beginning of the next Great Season, that of Easter, begins next week. Now, we’re a bit of time away from Easter – approximately 80 days, to be accurate. But, we start the countdown next week – Septuagesima (70 days), Sexagesima (60 days), Quinquagesima (50 days), etc. We don’t like waiting, and certainly don’t want to push out the expectation any more than we have to. But, we must enter into a season of transition (Pre Lent), in order to truly appreciate Lent (the time where we consider our sins, our sinfulness, and why Christ had to come to save us). The world around us doesn’t like to wait – in fact, we’re constantly in a pursuit of making things happen faster, and having less “lag time” to waste. We don’t like to wait, but the church year makes us slow down and ponder things.

For others of us, there’s a different kind of waiting. If we have to miss out on the gifts of God in Word and Sacrament due to winter weather and icy conditions, waiting for the next Sunday seems to take forever. The same is true for those who are sick with COVID-19, having to spend time at home, waiting for symptoms to subside so that we are not an obvious danger to others around us. No matter whether the groundhog sees his shadow or not this morning in Punxtawney, PA, we’re probably going to have six more weeks of winter ahead of us. We sometimes get discouraged by this, and can’t wait for the green grass and leaves to appear. We don’t like to wait, and bridle against such restrictions.

Those who are waiting for the birth of a child spend nine or ten months waiting for their precious bundle of joy to appear; soon afterward, they wonder just what lies in store for this gift of God, both as they’re growing up, and when they reach adulthood and live up to the wonderful promise that

God has in store for their lives. All of these examples are familiar to us – we’re used to waiting. Even though we don’t necessarily like it, we have experience after experience of going through it.

In our text, Simeon and Anna are given as examples of waiting a lifetime for something so wonderful that it defies words to express. Many around them must have told them that they should give up on waiting – after all, it didn’t seem like they were going to see the fruit of their preparation and hopes and dreams. However, God always keeps His promises, and we will see by going through this text that when God promises something, He ALWAYS delivers.

Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel”. People thought that this was going to be the political liberation from the Romans that they had been waiting for. The Romans weren’t known for their kindness to those under their control, and the Jews were no exception – things were brutal for them. That was one of the things that disappointed the people so much when Jesus came and ministered among them – they were looking for the wrong kind of Savior. They thought that they were receiving relief from a temporary problem of Roman domination; He came to bring liberty to the captives of sin

The Savior of the world was present in Simeon’s arms – WOW! What an answer to prayer; what a revelation to behold! Simeon – “I can die now – I’ve seen the Lord’s Christ! Nothing could compare to the overwhelming bliss and joy of such a moment. He’d been waiting all of his life, and was now an old man. He still believed in God’s promise to save His people, and now the Savior was present in His arms. He knew what was going on – let’s read the words again: ²⁹ Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” Now you’re letting Your servant depart in peace – peace between God and man was made once and for all by the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Salvation is prepared in the sight of all peoples – not just the Israelites, but the Gentiles, too – that’s what we call universal atonement – Christ

died for all people. Revelation to the Gentiles – they hadn't seen this coming, hadn't heard about this before – but they would understand easier than the Jews would, because this was a new teaching. Glory to Your people, Israel – the Israelites would be glorified, would receive the promised heavenly glory, simply by the coming of the promised Savior, Jesus

A sword would pierce the soul of Mary – what's this talking about? She would be at the foot of the cross; she would be present throughout His earthly ministry, and see firsthand how He would be humiliated, mistreated, flogged, beaten, and ultimately killed. She would see all of this, knowing that He was the Savior, and being powerless to stop the mistreatment and abuse. Plus, there would be the powerful maternal instincts to overcome – no one likes to see their child be mistreated – the “mama bear” comes to the fore

Anna – we don't hear much about her in Scripture, don't have a “song” like we do the Nunc Dimittis committing Simeon's words to the ages, like a couple of the hymns we're going to sing (the closing hymn 937 and the last communion hymn 924 – it's amazing how the different hymn writers through the years have put different tunes to the same text, so that we have a way to commit such words to memory easier) – but she was an important part of the equation, too. Once again, she was an old person who had lived her entire life waiting for the Child to be born – and here He was, presented in the Temple. Much like Hannah in the Old Testament reading, this was a miracle child coming into Anna's life. This would only be possible with God, to make such a blessed event happen. Anna had devoted her entire life to the Temple – she was married young, widowed young – the Temple and the events therein were the only thing she really had in her life. What a wonderful thing – to be waiting for the Child to be born, and have Him be presented in the Temple in her midst. Maybe that's why she never left the temple – she was given an urgency to know that this would be happening, and she didn't want to miss it. Like the 5 Wise Virgins in the parable, she didn't want to be running back to town on an errand when the Bridegroom, the Savior of the World, came into the Temple – it wasn't like Mary and

Joseph made an appointment! Remember, these were humble peasant folk – there wasn't any fanfare. That's why it was so surprising to the people that Simeon and Anna made such a big deal about His coming – because He didn't look any different than any other 40-day-old baby boy being presented in the temple.

We, too, are waiting – for the Last Day to come. Unlike Simeon and Anna, we aren't waiting to see the Lord's Christ in the form of a Child. However, we know that He is in our midst every day: Word and Sacraments – that's where we behold and receive Him on a regular basis. That's where the Holy Spirit has told us that He will be for us. We don't look elsewhere, or especially within ourselves, for Him – we look where He has told us to look. He could certainly be elsewhere (he's all powerful, after all), but He has told us to look in these places, so that's where we look. He will never leave us nor forsake us, just like the promises to Simeon and Anna were kept.

While we're waiting, we speak the Good News to those who are willing to listen to us. We remind them that just because He has delayed His coming, that doesn't mean He's forgotten about us, or isn't coming anymore. During this Epiphany season (or season of making Him known), that ends today with Candlemas, we make known the fact that while we're waiting, we've also received the promised Savior. During the upcoming Pre Lent and Lenten seasons, we do the same thing – we talk about the upcoming Passion of the Christ that we prepare to ponder, reflecting on the various aspects of during Holy Week and Easter. We don't just jump into Easter willy-nilly – we get ready for it, because it's so impactful and important. Rather than just sitting back and enjoying the promise for ourselves, we speak the Good News to others that even though things are bad in this world, there is a world coming that is much better – heaven to come. Don't be discouraged by the news that you hear on TV – this world is groaning in “birth pangs” – waiting for the next world to be revealed. Sin completely corrupts this world – we can see this – but take heart – Christ has overcome the world. He came to the Temple on the 40th day of His incarnation – He didn't delay – He completely fulfilled the Law of the Lord (this is

mentioned numerous times in our text) IN OUR PLACE. That's part of His active obedience – He kept every Law of God perfectly – never sinned ONCE – so that we would not be held liable for our breaking of God's law every day. God couldn't forget about our disobedience – there had to be a death, and Christ provided it. He came – to die! That's all there is to it! Not to stay a cuddly little baby in the manger of Bethlehem, but to die the death of a criminal on the tree of the Cross.

Like Simeon and Anna, we might start thinking that the critics are right, and that He isn't truly coming back. This becomes more and more difficult to refute as the days grow longer between His Advent, His coming, and His second coming. But, we know that God ALWAYS keeps His promises, and won't stop now!

As we pass 40 days since the celebration of Christ's incarnation at Christmas, we take stock of what's happened since then. 40, after all, is a great number in the Scriptures and in the church – it's not an accident that God chose to use this symmetry. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert; the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land; Christ ascended into heaven 40 days after He rose from the dead at His Resurrection. This 40 is an intentional number! We've seen Jesus in the temple as a 12-year-old boy; seen Him be Baptized by John in the Jordan River as a 30-year-old man; and visited by the Magi about two years after His birth. Now, we see Him fulfilling another of the numerous Old Testament prophecies and Laws – He was presented in the temple, for the purification of His mother, Mary, from the stain of childbirth; to show the people (and us today) that He is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament; and to remind us of the promise given to Simeon, Anna and all of us from the dawn of time, ever since the fall into sin of Adam and Eve. Because He kept this and every Law of the Old Testament, and was the marking of the falling and rising of Israel (mention MUST be made here about this connection to His crucifixion and resurrection – again, what Simeon was saying wasn't just a stream of consciousness, but a prediction of future events), we have hope.

As we wait, let us do so with joy, so that people will ask – why do they have hope when the world grieves? That’s the REAL message of Epiphany: joy amidst impatient, straining waiting. We don’t like to wait any more than anyone else; but we do so because we have the promise that we will not wait forever. Even if we die first, God doesn’t abandon us to the grave, but will take us up into heaven with those who are still alive at the Last Day – that’s what St. Paul promises us in 1 Corinthians 15.

Who knows? Next year, it might be Green Bay vs. Kansas City in Super Bowl LV – a rematch of I and IV. One can only dream! Seriously, though, even though I run the risk of trivializing the waiting of Simeon and Anna, this closely approximates what they went through, with a contemporary twist upon it. Waiting with eager expectation – that’s what we do when we are waiting for the ALREADY COMPLETED consolation of Israel – with the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. That’s what we’re truly waiting for! Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.