

CANDLEMAS 2014
SERMON – CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
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MALACHI 3.1 ST. LUKE 2.22



It is what Simeon had been waiting all his life for--what Orthodox Christians call by the Greek word Hypapante--The Meeting. And now for a brief moment in time, he held the Salvation of the World in his arms.

The Western Church of which we are a part of gives today several other names--the Presentation of Christ in the Temple--the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin--and its less-common name--Candlemas. Each of these names tell stories that are epiphanies--striking appearances--for who Jesus is.

But it is the presentation of Jesus to Simeon in the Gospel that draws us into the very personal epiphany--the very personal striking appearance--that is The Meeting. This was the fulfillment of God's promise to Simeon that he would live to see the Messiah.

Everything we know about Simeon comes from today's Gospel reading. He is called a good and God-fearing man who was waiting patiently for Israel to be saved. He was probably the priest on duty the day Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple. Simeon is believed to have been over 100 years old.

Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple when he was 40 days old because they were following the law prescribed in Leviticus. This was also the time Mary went through the ritual purification that would allow her to again attend Temple services. The Prayer Book liturgy called the Churching of Women or the Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth has its roots in the ancient observances we commemorate today.

The Prophet Malachi foretold 500 years earlier that God would send his messenger to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist made Malachi's prophecy come true when he told people he was not the one they should follow and pointed to Jesus and called him the Lamb of God. Malachi also prophesied that when the Messiah finally came he would make a sudden appearance at his Temple.

And now Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms--he held the Son of God close to his heart--and he rejoiced. He gave thanks to God and said he could now die in peace because God had kept his promise--he had seen the One who would save Israel--and the whole world.

Simeon's prayer of thanks was much like the final prayers said at the end of a Requiem Mass. It was his own prayer of commendation--which we call the *Nunc dimittis*--Lord, now lettest thou thy

servant depart in peace. It is the second canticle normally said at Evening Prayer and we will sing it today after Communion.

In his prayer, Simeon calls Jesus the light to reveal God's will to the Gentiles and bring glory to his people Israel. Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to offer him to God, and then redeem him--buy him back--with a substitute offering of two doves. Simeon understood that redemption was not about a Messiah who would lead an armed revolt and re-establish an earthly kingdom. Redemption was about God saving all of humankind from itself--with Jesus as the substitute offering--the redemption ticket out of sin.

Simeon also had a personal message for Mary and what he said to her must have been hard for her to hear or understand. He told her that the child she had presented to him to be blessed and he had given back to her, was a sign from God many people would reject, and she would have a broken heart. Mary would later remember Simeon's prophetic words on Good Friday.

We cannot forget Anna. Everything we know about her also comes from today's Gospel. She is called a very old prophetess--tradition says she was perhaps 115 years old--who never left the Temple, and prayed and fasted constantly. When she saw Jesus, she went on to tell everyone she too had seen God's promised Messiah.

The lighted candles we held during the reading of the Gospel--the Candlemas part of today's Liturgy--are a reminder for us that Jesus is the Light of the World and compel us to remember Hypapante--The Meeting--between Jesus and Simeon. We are called to wait with the same patience Simeon and Anna showed--for our own Hypapante--our own Meeting--the day Saint Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians all the Saints of God will be gathered up to meet the Lord in the air.

Hypapante--The Meeting--it will be well worth the wait!

