

CANDLEMAS 2016

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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MALACHI 3.1 ST. LUKE 2.22

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It was a meeting like no other...the old man held the Salvation of the World in his hands...and Simeon gave thanks to God and said:

“Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel.”

All we know about Simeon comes from today's Gospel reading. He is called a good 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.

Orthodox Christians call today *Hypapante...the Meeting* in Greek. We know it as the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* and the *Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin*. The candles we blessed and lighted and held during the reading of the Gospel and the Creed give today another name...Candlemas. We take the blessed candles home with us to light and remind us Jesus is the Light of the World...made known to us in striking appearances.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple and presented him to Simeon they were doing what the Book of Leviticus instructed them to do...to take Jesus to the Temple forty days after his birth...to present him to God...and then to redeem him...to buy him back...with an offering of two doves. This was also the time for Mary to be ritually purified so she could once again attend Temple services.

The Gospel 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. This was the fulfillment of what the prophet Malachi wrote 600 years before the birth of Jesus...the Messiah would make a sudden and striking 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 thanked God for keeping his promise...God always keeps his promises. Simeon's prayer of thanks was much like the final prayers said at the end of a Requiem Mass.

Simeon was giving 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 said or sung at Evening Prayer and we will sing it after we receive Holy Communion today...our response to Jesus' striking appearance in giving us his Body and Blood.

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 given back to her...was a sign from God many people would reject...and she would have a broken heart. Mary would remember Simeon's prophetic words on Good Friday as she watched her son complete his mission of Salvation for the world.

There is one other person who has something to say...and her name is Anna. Everything we know for certain about her also comes from today's Gospel. She is called a prophetess. Tradition says she was perhaps 115 years old...she prayed and fasted and was a regular fixture in the Temple. When she saw Jesus, she went on to tell everyone she too had seen God's promised Messiah.

Hypapante...the Meeting...the appearance Jesus made to Simeon...was indeed a meeting like no other. We are called to live our lives and wait with the same patience Simeon showed...we wait for the day Saint Paul tells us all the Saints of God will be gathered up to meet Jesus in heaven.

It will be our *Hypapante...our own Meeting* with Jesus...the striking appearance well worth the wait!

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