

CANDLEMAS / IV EPIPHANY 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

MALACHI 3.1 ST. LUKE 2.22



“The old man was carrying the infant child...but it was the child who was guiding the old man.”

This modern translation of the Alleluia Verse sung before today’s Gospel doesn’t come from Scripture. It’s from a sermon by the great 4th century theologian and Doctor of the Church...Saint Augustine of Hippo.

In the Eastern Orthodox churches the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is sometimes called *Hypapante...Meeting* in Greek. For a moment in time...an old man named Simeon who served God daily in the Temple...held the Salvation of the World in his arms.

God promised Simeon he would not die until he saw the One who would save Israel and the whole world. God kept his promise and Simeon rejoicing gives thanks to God and gives his own commendation prayer:

“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.”

Simeon’s Prayer is familiar to us...the *Nunc dimittis*...the second canticle said or sung at Evening Prayer and we will sing it today after we receive Holy Communion.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is also known as Candlemas from the custom of blessing candles used at the High Altar throughout the year. The small tapers that were blessed and given to the people and kept lighted for the reading of the Gospel and Nicene Creed should be taken home and lighted to remind us Jesus is the Light of the World.

In the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple we share in a very personal epiphany...a very personal striking appearance...in the Meeting between God and Simeon. It is the first appearance Jesus makes to the Temple...fulfilling what the Prophet Malachi

foretold 500 years earlier...“The Lord will suddenly appear in his Temple.” Jesus will make many visits to the Temple over the course of his life. We will remember Malachi’s prophecy again on Palm Sunday...Jesus’ sudden striking appearance at the Temple will get people’s attention.

Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple when he was 40 days old...following the Law prescribed in Leviticus. Every first-born male child was to be brought to the Temple and presented to the priest for service in the Temple. The child was “redeemed” or “bought back” by his parents who offered a lamb or two doves in his place. This was also the time Mary went through the ritual purification that would allow her to again rejoin society and attend Temple services...the reason today is also called the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin.

While not often seen today...the Rite in the *Book of Common Prayer* called The Churching of Women or the Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth has its roots in the ancient observances of the Purification. Today we join with Joe and Farrah Calder in giving thanks for the safe delivery of Joey...who is making his own appearance in God’s house.

Simeon had a personal message for Mary...he told her the child she had presented to him to be blessed and given back to her...would be rejected by many...and leave her with a broken heart. Mary would later remember Simeon’s prophetic words on Good Friday.

We can’t forget Anna. Everything we know about her comes from today’s Gospel. Tradition says she was perhaps 115 years old... she 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 child whose birth we continue to celebrate today...guides us and is the Light who reveals God’s will to us. Let’s prepare our hearts and minds and souls for our own *Hypapante*...our own *Meeting* with Jesus...as we receive his Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

We too have seen the Salvation of the World.

