

CANDLEMAS / EPIPHANY IV 2020
THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
MALACHI 3.1 ST. LUKE 2.22



"THE OLD MAN HELD THE YOUNG CHILD IN HIS ARMS; YET WAS THE YOUNG CHILD THE OLD MAN'S KING."

The Gradual which we heard minutes ago before the reading of the Gospel...sets the stage for today's story. It is the story of a meeting...not like any other meeting...a meeting between the aged Simeon and God. For a brief moment in history...an old man held the Salvation of the World in his arms...and he praised God with these words:

"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."

We celebrate the MEETING...HYPAPANTE in Greek...in word and song...and in the blessing and lighting of candles. We call today Candlemas. Like Simeon...we too have seen the Light of the World. We kept the candles lighted during the Gospel and through our Profession of Faith...the Nicene Creed...God reveals himself to us through Jesus.

Saint Luke tells us Simeon was a just and devout man who spent most of his time in the Temple waiting for Israel to be saved. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, who had assured him he would not die until he had seen the promised Messiah. He had waited lived for this very moment to come to pass.

The Prophet Malachi foretold 500 years before the birth of Jesus:

"I WILL SEND MY MESSENGER TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR ME. THEN THE LORD YOU ARE LOOKING FOR WILL SUDDENLY COME TO HIS TEMPLE."

Simeon had been patiently waiting for Malachi's prophecy to come true...he wouldn't have to wait any longer. God kept his promise.

Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Temple when he was forty days old...to offer him to God and to give thanks for his life. Simeon gave Jesus back to his mother with some startling words: sorrow like a sharp sword, would break her heart. She would learn much later what Simeon's words meant.

Quietly praying in the background we see Anna. She too has patiently waited for HYPAPANTE...the MEETING. She stayed in the Temple day and night, fasting and praying, and her faith in God never waivered. And in the end, she too was rewarded. She saw Jesus for who he is...the Light of the World...and she told what she had seen to all who were looking for hope.

Today we also commemorate Mary's Purification...since the birth of Jesus forty days earlier...this is the first time she could enter the Temple to worship.

In the *Book of Common Prayer*...the Liturgy for the Churching of Women...or the Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth...has its roots in the ancient Purification observances we commemorate today.

Today is also the Fourth and last Sunday after the Epiphany this year. Candlemas...the Presentation of Christ in the Temple...the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin ...Hypapante...the Meeting...all describe the Epiphany...the striking appearance of Jesus as God's Son...the salvation of the world...the Light that overcomes darkness and reveals God's will to world...and brings God's glory to each of us.

God kept his promise to Simeon. He could now die in peace because he had held the Salvation of the World in his arms. God will keep his promise to us too.

For now we wait with the same patience Simeon and Anna showed...for Jesus to return at his final Epiphany...his final showing. That day will bring with it a forever Easter...where in the words of our closing hymn...we will sing Alleluia joyfully.

