

## Presentation of Our Lord Candlemas Thursday, February 02, 2012

### GOSPEL: Luke 2:22–40

*This story is a study in contrasts: the infant Jesus with the aged prophets; the joy of birth with the ominous words of Simeon to Mary; the faithful fulfilling of the law with the presentation of the one who will release its hold over us. Through it all, we see the light of God's salvation revealed to the world.*

<sup>22</sup>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 <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), <sup>24</sup>and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup>“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;

<sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

<sup>33</sup>And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

<sup>36</sup>There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>then as a widow to the age of eighty- four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

<sup>22</sup>Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν κατὰ τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως, ἀνήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παραστήσαι τῷ κυρίῳ, <sup>23</sup>καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν νόμῳ κυρίου ὅτι Πᾶν ἄρσεν διανοίγον μήτραν ἅγιον τῷ κυρίῳ κληθήσεται, <sup>24</sup>καὶ τοῦ δοῦναι θυσίαν κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον ἐν τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου, ζεύγος τρυγόνων ἢ δύο νοσσοὺς περιστερῶν. <sup>25</sup>Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος ἦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ ᾧ ὄνομα Συμεών, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβής, προσδεχόμενος παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ πνεῦμα ἦν ἅγιον ἐπ' αὐτόν. <sup>26</sup>καὶ ἦν αὐτῷ κεχρηματισμένον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον πρὶν [ἢ] ἂν ἴδῃ τὸν Χριστὸν κυρίου. <sup>27</sup>καὶ ἦλθεν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν: καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσαγαγεῖν τοὺς γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον

τοῦ νόμου περὶ αὐτοῦ <sup>28</sup>καὶ αὐτὸς ἐδέξατο αὐτὸ εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας καὶ εὐλόγησεν τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπεν, <sup>29</sup>Νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, δέσποτα, κατὰ τὸ ῥημά σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ· <sup>30</sup>ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου <sup>31</sup>ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν, <sup>32</sup>φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἔθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραὴλ. <sup>33</sup>καὶ ἦν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ θαυμάζοντες ἐπὶ τοῖς λαλουμένοις περὶ αὐτοῦ. <sup>34</sup>καὶ εὐλόγησεν αὐτοὺς Συμεὼν καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς Μαριὰμ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ, Ἴδου οὗτος κεῖται εἰς πτώσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον <sup>35</sup>{καὶ σοῦ [δὲ] αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία}, ὅπως ἂν ἀποκαλυφθῶσιν ἐκ πολλῶν καρδιῶν διαλογισμοί. <sup>36</sup>Καὶ ἦν Ἄννα προφῆτις, θυγάτηρ Φανουήλ, ἐκ φυλῆς Ἀσὴρ· αὕτη προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ἡμέραις πολλαῖς, ζήσασα μετὰ ἀνδρὸς ἕτη ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς, <sup>37</sup>καὶ αὐτὴ χήρα ἕως ἑτῶν ὀγδοήκοντα τεσσάρων, ἣ οὐκ ἀφίστατο τοῦ ἱεροῦ νηστείας καὶ δεήσεων λατρεύουσα νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν. <sup>38</sup>καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐπιστάσα ἀνωμολογεῖτο τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλάλει περὶ αὐτοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς προσδεχομένοις λύτρωσιν Ἱερουσαλήμ. <sup>39</sup>Καὶ ὡς ἐτέλεσαν πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν νόμον κυρίου, ἐπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς πόλιν ἑαυτῶν Ναζαρέθ. <sup>40</sup>Τὸ δὲ παιδίον ἠύξανεν καὶ ἐκραταιοῦτο πληρούμενον σοφία, καὶ χάρις θεοῦ ἦν ἐπ' αὐτό.

## “Advocati”

Earlier this morning, away off in the *Far East* (Pennsylvania), Punxsutawney Phil, the most famous Groundhog in the World, 65 miles north of the city of Pittsburg, at a shrine called Gobbler’s Knob, emerged from his lair, saw his shadow and in the presence of 18,000 onlookers, predicted that there would be “six more weeks of winter.”

One thousand, seven hundred and twenty-seven point three (1,727.3) miles to the West of where the Prognosticator of Prognosticators has made his prediction, a group of the faithful have gathered in a small Lutheran Church exactly forty days after the Festival of Christmas, when the Church marks the legendary day upon which Mary and Joseph took their infant to the Temple in Jerusalem, bought a pair of pigeons as an offering for the sacrifice and – in their tradition – presented him as holy to God.

A man by the name of Simeon held the baby in his arms and spoke what we Christians have said or sung for ages as the *Nunc Dimittis* (*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace ...*) and an aging female-prophet named Anna began to speak about this baby, that in him and through him God would act to bring about what he (Jesus) would call *the Kingdom ...* a world where everything would change so that love and compassion and understanding and justice would penetrate into the darkness and take it over.

Here is what happened, as that infant grew into adulthood as told by the great Storyteller of our Christian Scriptures, the writer we call Luke.

It takes place not in Jerusalem, but in the hometown of Jesus, up north in the Galilee, in the village of Nazareth, under Roman Occupation, as was most of the region in those days.

One Shabbat (Sabbath) he went to the local synagogue as was his custom, was called to the Bimah, that elevated platform where one read the Torah and the words of the Prophets, was handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, unrolled it until he found these words and then read them:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>1</sup>

As Luke tells the story, after Jesus gave the scroll back to the attendant and sat down, all eyes were fixed on him and the next words out of his mouth were: “Today this scripture (writing) has been fulfilled in your midst.”

And then he began to do a little *Midrash* (a teaching) not quite a sermon, but close to a tiny homily and the result of that was that everyone got upset and took him bodily outside to the edge of the cliff and had he not slipped through the crowd, would have been thrown off.

And the very next thing he did, in Luke’s great Storytelling, was to walk down from the highlands to Capernaum on the north shore of the great Lake we know as the Sea of Galilee and began to teach, call his followers, heal the mother-in-law of one of his followers (Peter’s) and bring *good news* to many, many people who were troubled and ill and oppressed ... all under the watchful eyes of Caesar’s Army, the Occupying Force of Palestine in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE.

IN other words ... words, ancient words, holy words, words of God ... are only the beginning ...

... *the Kingdom* as Jesus called it takes place when followers of the Word (that would be us) stand up to read, sit down to study, reach out to speak, and sometimes taking great risks, move down from the highlands of our wonderful spirituality into the places where light can be brought into darkness, where actions of love and mercy and compassion and justice and honesty and integrity take place among people who are in need, who are oppressed, who are poor, who are brothers and sisters and often cannot speak for themselves in a world where Caesar after Caesar wants only for them to go away, to disappear.

IN Caesar’s own language, the word for this is *advocatus* ... the past participle of *advocare* “to call to one’s aid”.

In our church language, “... advocacy ministry speaks for biblical values: peacemaking, hospitality to strangers, care for creation, and concern for people living in poverty and struggling with hunger and disease.”<sup>2</sup>

In human language ... it is when and where we move beyond the mere thought of being faithful to God, to action, where true faithfulness to God comes into being, as we care for our neighbors and speak for them and lift them up with us into a world where no one is forgotten or ignored or unheard or unloved.

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In addition to Groundhog Day, and The Presentation of Our Lord, today is also *Candlemas*, the midpoint of Winter, halfway between the shortest day and the Spring Equinox, the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 4.18 ff; Isaiah 61.1 ff

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Advocacy.aspx>

time (before electricity) when all the candles in the Church were to be blessed and with those blessing of candles, the blessing of those who carry them to become more than symbols, to become *light shining in the darkness* ourselves, to become *advocati* ... those who speak and act in love on behalf of others.

The Psalm appointed for this day is 84, so let us stand, hold our candles as we say the Psalm responsively and then receive the Blessing of the Candles and those who bear them.

(See Attached Page below)

God our Creator,  
Source of all light,  
today you revealed to Simeon  
Your light of revelation to the nations.  
Bless + these candles and make them holy.  
May we who carry them to praise your glory  
walk in the path of goodness  
and come to the light that shines forever  
Grant this through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

+Deo Gratia  
The Rev. Benjamin Larzelere III  
Pastor

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## PSALM 84

How dear to me is your dwelling,

**O LORD of hosts!**

My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the LORD;

**my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.**

Even the sparrow has found a home,

and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young,

**by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts, my king and my God.**

Happy are they who dwell in your house!

**They will always be praising you.**

Happy are the people whose strength is in you,

**whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.**

Those who go through the balsam valley will find it a place of springs,

**for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.**

They will climb from height to height,

**and the God of gods will be seen in Zion.**

LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;

**give ear, O God of Jacob.**

Behold our defender, O God;

**and look upon the face of your anointed.**

For one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

**I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.**

For the LORD God is both sun and shield,  
bestowing grace and glory;

**no good thing will the LORD withhold from those who walk with integrity.**

O LORD of hosts,

**happy are they who put their trust in you!**

