



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

Candlemass 2025

Readings: Malachi 3: 1-4, Ps 23, Hebrews 2: 14-18, Luke 2: 22-40

It is a well-known fact of human existence that death is what happens to other people. Of course we know, as rational people, that this is not the case and that our turn will come. But that is an intellectual and theoretical acceptance, not to be confused with the deeper understanding which cannot conceive of our non-being. It follows therefore that it is not something we look forward or rejoice at its coming upon us and, in many cases will do everything in our power to avoid or at least delay the inevitable. This common human response makes today's Gospel account all the more extraordinary and challenging.

Between the birth of Jesus and today's story lie some 40 days. This is the period of ritual 'uncleanness' dictated by the Levitical Law of the Old Testament after giving birth to a son. This 'uncleanness' has nothing to do with being 'dirty' but rather simply (and mercifully) puts the woman 'out of bounds' as it were for 6 weeks from the attentions of her husband.

During these 40 days we assume that the Holy Family found more suitable lodgings than the birthplace stable and, possibly during that time, received

the mysterious visit of the Magi. We know, from Luke's account that they were in a house by then.

So the Holy Family ship up at the Temple to give thanks for Jesus birth and to effect the rites of Purification prescribed by the Law. After the excitements of angel-alerted shepherds and gift bearing foreigners, they were perhaps expecting a little respite from the attendant consequences of the supernatural. Being among thousands of daily pilgrims to the Temple, they might have passed unnoticed but for the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

As they begin to enter to make the offering of the poor, two turtledoves, they are accosted by an old man named Simeon. He has, he tells them been waiting for the 'consolation of Israel'. He has been led there by the Holy Spirit and, now he has seen the Messiah, the Saviour, he can die in peace – just as the Lord had promised him. He rejoices at the knowledge that enables him to die! This is light years away from our modern fear of death and quest for physical immortality. God's promise to him will be **fulfilled** in his being allowed to die. Furthermore, he has prophetic words for the 'Happy Couple' and their newborn.

First of all Jesus will be not just the Saviour of His own people, The Jews, but of the whole world – 'a light to enlighten the Gentiles.' Furthermore He will a sign that will lead to the rise and fall of many in Israel and His Messiahship will be opposed. As indeed it was. And he speaks of Mary's suffering – a sword will pierce her soul, he says, and because of her the secret hearts of many will be disclosed. As indeed they are throughout the history of the Faith as the response to Mary always tells us what people truly believe about Jesus.

This dramatic outpouring is, we are told by Luke, the result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

No sooner has Simeon finished than the old prophetess, Anna, emerges from the Temple precincts, where she spends her life fasting and praying, to confirm Simeon's account and give thanks to God for the child who will deliver Jerusalem.

In addition to all the other remarkable happenings that have surrounded the conception and birth of Jesus, this is also a showstopper. They are now fully on the public stage in the capital city. It must have been an overwhelming moment of confirmation and of growing anxiety as the forces of darkness are about to be unleashed in pursuit of the Holy Family.

But to return to Simeon. What witnesses he and Anna are. Anna tells anyone who will listen who Jesus is. Simeon, far from wanting the time of the Messiah to be indefinitely postponed so that he could, as it were, live forever. Simeon is delighted that he has witnessed the salvation of the world coming and that, thankful and joyful and with blessing on his lips, he can now die in peace.

As those who, like Simeon, have held Christ in our arms, it is, after all, where we should be when the time comes.

As this is one of my favourite feasts I had tried to write a hymn but I offer you this instead:-

CANDLEMASS

Into my arms,
Sweet Mother of the mysteries of grace,
You place
Salvation's sacred sign.

Child borne at such great cost,
Conceived of that same Ghost
Who, in the mountain fastnesses, gave prophets Word,
Loud, in the still small voice of silence, clearly heard.
Now, maiden born, divine in manhood thus concealed
Through cleft in this new Eve
To patient Pentecostal hearts has been revealed
That ancient souls believe.
Into my hands,
Daughter of David's line, chosen and blest,
You rest
The destiny of Man.
This tiny hand that flung the stars in space
Holds gnarled and dying fingers to His face.
With eyes, that saw a million suns ablaze,
Breathed on this dust and granted all my days.
Let Temple Gates be opened wide and incense burned.
The Presence of the Lord of Glory has returned.
Blessed Maiden pure
Mother of Christ
Must much endure
Who opens Paradise.

Into my heart,
Loved mother of believers throughout time,
You pour
The balm of Gilead,
Anointing me for death and for new life.

Whilst in your soul is thrust rejection's knife
By those whose hatred of your Son their dark reveal,
Kill love and perish thus unhouseled, unaneled.
Lord now you let your servant go in peace.
This child, from sin and death, shall me release.
I have sought you and you found me - death holds no fear
With Mary's arms around me and the Christ child near.