

Luke 2:22-40/Candlemas - Feb 2, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the light of revelation for the Gentiles. Amen.

Welcome to the Presentation of our Lord Sunday, also known as Candlemas.

You should count yourselves very fortunate to be here today, because this holy day does not hit on a Sunday very often. 2014 was the last time that it did, and I think Roman Catholics are the only ones to celebrate it every year, because they celebrate mass every day.

Anyway. If you do your math, you will realize that today is 40 days after Christmas. You may have noticed that white days tie our calendar to God's calendar. So, we're stepping out of the green season to remember what happened in Jesus' life 40 days after his birth on the 40th day after Christmas.

40 days after his birth, Mary and Joseph went to the Temple in Jerusalem so that they could offer the proper sacrifice, which was customary. Because they were poor, as most people were, they offered two turtledoves.

Now today is called Candlemas, because of Simeon's proclamation in today's Gospel. Simeon picked up the infant Jesus and said, while praising God, "my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles."

It's that line, "light for revelation to the Gentiles," that has made today the day to bless candles, because candles provide light.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Light brings revelation; it reveals things. With light we see things more clearly. And, for the Gentiles, Jesus is the light that reveals that no one is outside of God's mercy, not even the Gentiles.

Now, I find it interesting that a man named Simeon said this. Simeon was one of the tribes of Israel, one of the sons of Jacob. Simeon became one of the forgotten tribes, because it got absorbed by Judah. Most people do not even realize that. So, here we have a member of one of the obscure tribes declaring that Jesus is God's salvation for the entire world.

Again, he wasn't part of the Levites – the priestly cast – nor was he a member of the tribe of Judah – who were all related to King David.

No. Simeon is an insignificant old man by their standards, and yet he is the one who gets to see the Savior for whom he's longed his entire life.

Simeon has about the same status as the Shepherds, and here God is again revealing God's self to the least, last, lost, and lowly.

Now, you can imagine, there were thousands of people in the Temple that day, but it was Simeon who was blessed with the revelation that Jesus is the long promised Savior, a savior for whom he'd been waiting his entire life.

Again, this goes to show you that if you're looking, God will reveal God's self to you. It's not that God isn't present in front of the others as well. But, because they're not looking, they are also not seeing. It's like looking at a "Where's Waldo" book and not knowing that you're supposed to be looking for Waldo. You may come across him, but you don't realize he's of any significance.

So, I guess it's only fitting that on this obscure holy day, it is an obscure old man from an obscure tribe who makes the proclamation that Jesus is the light of the nations, a light to all those who had lost their identity in God. Great news for sure!

And then there was Anna as well. Anna was from the tribe of Asher. Asher was one of the northern tribes that were taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Asher was one of the cursed tribes, because of the idolatry of the northern kingdom. And, those who were not taken to Assyria were left to mingle with the Assyrians that came to them. Those cross-breeds are the people that we know as the Samaritans.

Now, because Anna was a Samaritan, she was likely in the most outer ring of the Temple – the court of the nations. Non-Jews were able to get to the most outer court of the Temple, but not any further. So, she couldn't even get into the women's court, which was just one ring further in. But, there she was on the outskirts worshipping and praying – for 77 years! 77 years! At the Temple! A place she could never fully go into.

77 years. Double 7s. Numerically speaking that is double perfection, or double wholeness or completeness. 77 also comes up in the number of times we should forgive someone.

And on top of being a Samaritan, Anna is also a woman – an old widow woman, evidently without any sons. We're scraping the bottom of the barrel here folks.

But, she was a prophet, even though a Samaritan. She was someone blessed by God to hear God's message for the world, even though she was an outsider. And the message is - Here is the child who will redeem Jerusalem!

Now that may seem strange as well. Redeem Jerusalem? Yes. Redeem Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was to be the light for all nations.

Jerusalem was to bring all people into a relationship with God. That was Abraham's task, but his descendants had failed miserably. They had forgotten their task. Anna and Simeon could vouch for that. They were on the fringe, but they didn't give up.

Anna and Simeon held tight to God's promise and they believed that God would fulfill God's promise, and God gifted them by revealing the savior of all nations to them.

Through Christ they would no longer be forgotten people. Through Jesus, they, and all of their family members who followed them, would be restored into God's family. And, that is the glory of Israel, the light of Israel, to reveal God to all people. They were chosen for that specific task – to reveal God to the world.

With Anna and Simeon as our role models, we are encouraged to hold onto God's promises, even when it appears that they will never be fulfilled. We are to never give up, to keep on praying, to keep on hoping, to believe that God is faithful, because God is faithful. It's just that our time frame and God's time frame don't always match up.

All in good time. All in God's time. Keep the faith.

Simeon and Anna were old people, really old by the standard of the day, but they didn't give up. Anna didn't say, we'll I've been here 70 years and nothing has happened, I guess I'll just go home and die. No. She kept going – every day.

And, so that made me wonder in this Amazon Prime kind of world, a world of instant gratification, what are we willing to wait a long time for? What are we willing to live in hope for? What are we willing to keep watch for?

Simeon and Anna just talked to God. That's all they could do. They were forgotten powerless people. But, not to God. And it's probably because they could do nothing on their own that they were so close to God.

When you have power, you don't need God. You can rely on yourself. But, God is the most powerful, so when we turn the things that are impossible for us to "fix" over to God, that's the only way that they will be accomplished.

So, how can we be like Anna and Simeon here and now? How can we be good ancestors? Those older ones who keep the faith and keep our eyes open for God for the sake of those who will come after us?

How are we good ancestors knowing that the prayers we offer today may not change our lives, but will impact all those who follow us? What are the seeds we can plant now in hope that will bring peace to those who follow us?

Anna and Simeon saw Jesus when he was only 40 days old. It would be another 33 years before his death and resurrection.

They only saw the beginning and there is no way they would be alive to see the end, but that was enough for them, they saw the ball starting to roll, and with that they went on their way rejoicing, because God's light had broken into the darkness.

God kept God's promise and their prayers had been answered, and because they were looking for their prayers to be answered, they saw Jesus, who was just a tiny seed packed full with potential.

God is not aloof and far away. God is with us here and now, and when we spend time in prayer, we know God's presence. And, because of that, we can bring hope into the world. We can shine God's light into the darkness. The light is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, God's love for us personified, who died and rose for all people. All of the nations. No one is outside of God's love.

And, God is working for our wellbeing in ways that we cannot even imagine, like through a little baby born in a stable, through rejection and murder, through Roman execution, through a young virgin, a middle aged carpenter, an obscure man from an obscure tribe, an outcast old woman, fishermen, people of no significance at all - and people just like you and me.

We are the light bearers for a dark world here and now.

Jesus Christ is the light who reveals God's love for all the nations, for all the peoples, and that is the light we, together, are sent to take out into the world, no matter where we came from. For God, there are absolutely no borders.

Thanks be to God. Amen.