

PRESENTED TO GOD

ISAIAH 61:10-62:3

LUKE 2:21-40

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I WONDER WHETHER MARY AND JOSEPH MADE ANY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS BEFORE STARTING BACK HOME.

I doubt they had weight problems so a diet would not be one of them. Neither one of them seemed to have anger-management issues, nor problems with patience...of course they **had** just become parents for the first time so this coming year would present the kinds of challenges only children can create. Their prayer life was probably good, and we can see from this morning's story that they were very religious, very pious Jews.

- ✚ They had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day according to the Law of Moses and named him Jesus as the angel had commanded Mary so to do.
- ✚ They remained in Bethlehem for forty days so that they could go up to nearby Jerusalem to perform the rites of Mary's purification.

✚ They presented Jesus, their first-born son to God in the temple and bought him back from the Lord, thus redeeming the world's redeemer.

So what might they have resolved to do? Perhaps their resolution was to be as prepared as they could be for the marvelous things that God was going to do through their son. If the visit of the shepherds with their tale of angelic messengers was not enough to put them on alert, surely their encounter with Simeon and Anna was. Luke tells us they were taken aback by what these prophets told them.

FIRST THERE WAS OLD SIMEON

Luke describes him as righteous and devout and "looking for the consolation of Israel". That is to say, he was looking for the time promised by Isaiah when Israel would be a light to the nations and God's salvation would go forth from Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had promised Simeon that he would not die before he saw the one who would fulfill God's promises. And on this day, the Spirit

directed Simeon to Mary and Joseph and the child. Leaping for joy, he takes Jesus in his arms and sings a song to God. His song praises God and asks that he be released from his task of watching for the savior. He can now live in peace and joy because Israel will be glorified and all creation will be redeemed as God had promised long ago to Abraham.

There is a dark side to all this, however. Jesus will be a stumbling block to many in Israel who will fall because of him. The expected one was not what many expected. As Martin Luther put it, "God became small for us in Christ". He did not come to thrash evil doers or to crush the Romans, but as an infant, to elicit love and to nurture tenderness. Ironically, this made many people angry.

Jesus will also be a stumbling block to many throughout the ages who will call themselves by his name and yet refuse to love enemies, forgive friends, or reflect his compassion to all whose lives they touch.

THEN THERE WAS ANNA.

...or as her name was in Hebrew, Hannah. You might remember Hannah; she was the mother of Samuel, the one who anointed King David from whose line the Messiah was to come, of whose line Jesus was. Luke's Hannah had been living in the temple precincts for nearly eighty years. She spent her days and nights in prayer and fasting, praying for the time when God would send his promised Messiah. She was the incarnation of what Jesus meant by pure in heart. She then became the first non-shepherd to spread the good news of Messiah's birth.

THIS SCENE TAKEN AS A WHOLE IS REFERRED TO IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION AS THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE.

Luke seems to see in it an echo of Hannah bringing Samuel to Eli as she promised God, so that Samuel could spend his life in God's service. Luke would thus have us

understand that Jesus is to spend his life in the same manner. In fact, Luke will underscore this idea by having Jesus remain behind in the temple on a future visit while he, like Samuel, was still a boy. From his conception, Jesus has been set aside for God's great work: to begin the end-time in which the kingdom of God will arrive.

SINCE THE MIDDLE AGES, ROMAN CATHOLICS HAVE INCLUDED THIS SCENE IN THE ROSARY.

It is the fourth of the Joyful Mysteries. The others are:

- ✚ The Annunciation
- ✚ The Visitation
- ✚ The Nativity
- ✚ The Finding in the Temple

Notice that they all come from Luke's Gospel. In fact they form the highlights of his so-called infancy narrative.

Taken as a whole they tell a story: Jesus will come into the world in a unique way from God. His destiny is joined to that of John the Baptist. He comes into the world as a lowly child to redeem the world. He lives under the Law

of God and fulfills God's prophecies concerning him. He early on in life seeks God and learns God's ways and will from the teachers of God's Sacred Scripture.

ABOUT NOW WE MIGHT BE ASKING LUKE, "WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?"

I'm quite certain that he is glad we asked. ***This story is about Jesus of course and speaks of his uniqueness in God's plan of salvation. But it speaks to us as well.*** Each one of us comes from God uniquely. Each one of us has been presented to God in our baptisms. Each one of us has a role to play in God's plan to redeem his creation. Each one of us is enlightened and empowered by the same Holy Spirit which empowered Jesus and guided Simeon and Anna. Each of us is called to "be about our Father's business" from our youth and until our death.

Tomorrow is the first day of the New Year. Let each of us this morning present ourselves to God once again and re-dedicate ourselves to his service.

