

Thomas R. Cook

Sermon for the Feast of the Presentation; St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota

9:00 and 11:15 Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist

The Presentation of our Lord in the Temple – February 2, 2020

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## “The Presentation of our Lord in the Temple”

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Scripture: Luke 2:22-40; Presentation

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It may be that I am a perpetually a kid, but I can't help but think of Disney's classic film, "The Lion King." Some of you may not have seen it. But picture this moment... As the sun rises hot over the sweeping vistas of the open African savannah, the animals are agitated and all astir. The hyenas and the lions and the zebras, the giraffes and hippopotamuses and gazelles, the birds and the insects and the reptiles are all urgently shuffling with purpose, all inexplicably in the same direction, moving toward a high and lonely outcropping of rock, a platform rising from the level plain of the savannah, like a stage all aglow in the rising sun. Anticipation is in the air, shimmering like the ripples of heat rising off the dusty horizon. And as the animals gather in massive herds too large to number at the bottom of the rock platform, an aged mandrill, that sort of baboon with the colorful face, shuffles toward the edge of the cliff into the sight of the countless animals crowded and shoving and stamping below. And in that mandrill's arms is held, nearly invisible, a tiny bundle of fur. And in a tense moment of anticipation, as the mandrill gazes down upon the crowded plain, the animals grow silent and look to the tiny package in his arms. Time stands

still, until... With a sweeping motion, the mandrill lifts the lion cub high above his head. The clouds part, the sun pours down upon the cliff, and lights up the tiny cub. The animals erupt in a cacophony of sound, each speaking their own language, stamping and bellowing, screeching and trumpeting, leaping and bowing down and singing with a loud and joyful noise as they greet their newborn... LION KING!!!  
Now THAT is a Presentation!!!

Yeh... it wasn't like that for Jesus in the Temple. I mean... I wish it was. I wish Jesus had been greeted with resounding praise by the hundreds, probably the thousands, of people who billowed in and out of the Temple in Jerusalem on that day when Jesus' parents entered to present him to the priests, to make the proper sacrifices for him and for his mother, Mary, as was required of faithful Jews by the Law of Moses. How I wish the people recognized him, knew him for who he was... the Son of God, the promised Savior, the Prince of Peace. How I wish they had bowed down, prayed and shouted praise. But as important as this day is for us Christians now, this Feast Day of the Presentation of our Lord, long ago it was only a couple of wise elders in the Temple who really seemed to take any notice at all: old Simeon and the prophet Anna.

And I get it. Jerusalem in Jesus' day is estimated to be a city of anywhere from 80,000 to 200,000 people or more, and the Temple buildings and grounds covered some 35 acres of the city, and the bustle of cosmopolitan life was alive and well in the great house of worship, and the comings and goings of the many, many people would certainly overshadow the devotions of a couple ordinary parents who had come to present their first-born child before the Lord. I'm sure everyone was busy with their own business. I doubt the people in the Temple around Mary and Joseph and the child were really expecting at that moment to see the redeemer of Israel. But Simeon did. I wonder if old Simeon was able to convince any of his friends of what he had seen? Or did Anna get much of an audience when she spoke about the child, or did people just quickly go on about their own business, leaving the strange old woman to herself?

I think on how distracted the world can be, particularly from that which is holy. You all know the Super Bowl will garner far more attention this day than will the Feast of the Presentation. The world arises with the sun each morning, and we scurry rapidly through our days, earning our wages, feeding our families, listening to the news—or avoiding it—caring for our illnesses, seeking entertainment and release from the burdens of life, all the business of living and dying. Think about it... Were Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna to meet in our times on a crowded morning at the

Minneapolis / St. Paul Airport, how many people might notice? Or if these biblical heroes were to encounter one another in a typical city cathedral on an ordinary day, would there even be any people in the cathedral to take notice?

But someone took notice. Because we are here this morning remembering the day when a faithful old man and an insightful old prophet did see “the Savior prepared for all the world to see.” And they had the faith to understand the importance of that moment and the courage to share it with anyone nearby who would listen. And isn’t it our part too to remember how blessed we are by that day in the Temple so long ago, how blessed we are that someone shared it with us, how blessed we are to be welcomed into the family of Christ, how much we gain by sharing our lives with one another, how important it is to pause in the presence of the Savior and give thanks, how good it is to share our hope in a world sometimes so hopeless? I believe it is so.

So picture the moment... Within the dimly lit confines of an old church of stone and glass, a single voice rises over the murmuring of the gathered crowd, calling the people to worship. Candlelight makes its way amongst the people, passes person to person, candle to candle, each with one in hand, brightening the darkness with a warm, golden glow. Prayers are offered. Musicians lift their voices. The Candlemas

has begun. And choir and ministers move in procession around the congregation, all singing hymns of praise to the Light of the World. The words of Holy Scripture fill the edifice. The People offer their prayers to the Most High. And from an elevated dais at the head of the church, the bread and wine of Holy Communion are raised high in the sight of the people. This is the Body and Blood of Christ, given for the life of the world. And the people say a loud “Amen.” And all are welcome to receive the gifts of Holy Communion. And the people stream forward to partake. And each person receives a candle, blessed in name of the Light of the World, to take home and burn in remembrance of the child once greeted by Simeon and Anna so long ago. Now... picture that moment happening in a thousand Episcopal Churches around the country, even now as we are gathered. And think of that moment happening in 10,000 / 20,000 churches all around the world this day. Now that IS a Presentation!!!

And all this flowing from a quiet meeting in the Temple, from an infant child carried by his mother, then cradled in the arms of a faithful old man near the end of his days who knew the Savior, voiced by an old woman with the faith to recognize in this little one, the presence of the Holy. Jesus, the King of Kings. The Light of the World.