

St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 1st February 2026
The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Luke 2.22-40.

We live in a bustling and lively city. The Australian Open has dominated our city's life over the past two weeks and the impact of the bushfires challenged many including those who lost property and loved ones as a result. The rest of us have been called to donate money and others have ramped up to our political leaders to do more about climate change. We have all been challenged in some ways by the events of the past few weeks.

I wonder then how the Holy Family must have felt as they moved through the crowds of Jerusalem with a newborn infant headed to the temple to fulfil a ritual obligation. Dust and spattered mud. The smell of market stalls and livestock alongside voices arguing over the price of wheat and bargaining for other goods and services. A different city bustle to ours but still an experience they were probably not accustomed to.

Today's Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple has no fewer than four different names. During my growing up years at St Bartholomew's Burnley we called it Candlemas and it was celebrated as one of the major feast days in the Church's calendar, marking the end of the Feast of Christmas, incorporating the Feast of the Epiphany and concluding with today's Feast. Each celebrates the coming of God's chosen one into the world, bringing light and hope for the benefit of the whole of creation. There are some people who now only pack away their Christmas trees.

The festival is called the Presentation of Christ. This is because it commemorates the presentation of Christ by Mary his mother in accordance with the Jewish custom of the times, in the Temple, 40 days after his birth. As the story unfolds in Luke's

Gospel as the Family enters the Temple a stranger steps into their path. There must have been something about him as Mary places the infant Jesus into the arms of the righteous Simeon who carries him into the Temple and watched over by the Prophet Anna. According to the Hebrew scriptures, the Jews were commanded and required to present their male children at the Temple, to give thanks to God for the birth of the child and to seal the purification of the mother as required by ritual law, for it was considered at the time that all mortal danger had passed.

A third title for the day, “The Purification of the Virgin”, was so named to give great honour to the Mother of God, and in some traditions is regarded as the Feast of all Mothers.

In today’s Gospel we read the account of Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the Temple. Here they meet Simeon and Anna. There is a meeting of generations. A family reunion or gathering of different generations we would probably say today.

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All these names are very proper, but I have a slightly different slant on the Gospel passage. I think about the story as a “Grandparent Story”, recognition of the faithfulness and wisdom of grandparents and their hopes for their Grandchildren.

In my previous work at Anglicare, I spoke regularly to a variety of different groups, some large and others small. Many of these groups were made up of parents and grandparents. In most of these discussions the needs of children in our times and the hopes and dreams of both parents and grandparents become centre stage. Grandparents especially, seemed increasingly anxious and concerned about what sort of world they were leaving for their grandchildren. Many also expressed anxiety and were deeply concerned about their grandchildren’s spiritual health, fuelled by a lack of religious knowledge and nurture. I know from conversations here at St Bartholomew’s and

elsewhere there are similar concerns expressed with many grandparents disappointed when their own grandchildren are not baptized.

The excitement on the arrival of the first grandchild cannot be ignored. Dinner parties, family gatherings, meetings of friends all become opportunities for the “Brag album”, the photos as well as endless discussions about the baby’s complexion, look a like features, as well as other aspects of the child’s milestones. All good and healthy, and the discussions continue with each succeeding child. I often contrast these discussions with the children who are left to die in a number of third world countries or affected by war and famine. Their pictures are a reminder to us of the defencelessness of children.

In today’s Gospel Simeon and Anna are nearing the end of their lives. They are both faithful Temple attendees and worshippers and from what we know from Luke’s account, heavily involved in the life of the Temple, and as the day draws to a close and others are leaving, they remain. Although physically ageing, their spirits are strong, and their faith remains a powerful force in their life. They would today be described as “Salt of the earth members of the parish”. Despite all that has happened in their lives they remain hopeful and focused, not despairing or bitter.

Luke’s account of the presentation of Christ in the Temple is a grandparent’s story because it is as story of promised hope fulfilled and as one writer describes it “as the coming together of the great thresholds of life, the birth of a child and approaching death; the beginnings and the endings. Endings that are in truth new beginnings.”

Luke tells us that Simeon has been waiting, looking forward to the consolation of Israel and the promise that he will not die until he has seen the Lord’s messiah. While he yearns and prays for such an event, he recognises it as the end of his own earthly

life. As he receives the babe in his arms to carry into the Temple he prays, or sings what we call the Song of Simeon or the Nunc Dimitis,

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace
your word has been fulfilled.
My own eyes have seen the salvation:
which you have prepared in the sight of every people;
A light to reveal you to the nations:
and the glory of your people Israel.

Simeon has wise words for Mary. Jesus is no ordinary child. While he sings and prays words of praise, he also warns of pain and suffering {a sword will pierce your own soul too}, words that no mother or parent would ever wish to hear about their newborn child. A recent suicide of a bright and intelligent year 12 student, who committed suicide for no apparent reason to her loving and caring parents brought home to me the tragedy a parent feels on the untimely death of a child or the possibility of pain and suffering.

Maybe Anna understood more about the pains and trial of motherhood more than Simeon, for at that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak of the future of Jerusalem depending on this newborn child. Luke goes on to tell us that Mary says yes to God in the wonderful Hymn of praise the Magnificent

As a parent I remember the cradling in my arms of our newborn children and the hopes both Judi and I consciously or otherwise spoke about to friends and families. Like many parents, but tragically and sadly not all. So many hopes wrapped up in swaddling clothes.

Simeon and Anna recognised the promise of God fulfilled in Jesus. In this child God had made plain his purpose clear. As Rowan Williams says in his book, “Tokens of Trust”,

In the events around Jesus Christ, God has made his Purpose clear; he has revealed the mystery hidden for ages past, he has shown us what his agenda is. What once was mysterious –or at least shadowy –has now emerged into daylight and the purposes of God that existed from the world's foundations are now laid bare before us.

Simeon and Anna are people of wisdom faith and experience. Life I suspect had not always been rosy or comfortable, but they remained forward thinking and hopeful that all would be well. While their physical faculties were declining their spirits remain vibrant and alive. They have aged boldly and with confidence.

As we live and gather at this time in history and in this place, whatever our age or ability are we prepared to be people of hope and faith like Simeon and Anna, rejoicing at the ever presence of Jesus in our own lives and in the call, he continues for the building of God's kingdom. Yes there is much banality, banter and distraction to encourage us to take our eye off the ball as we say, but there is also much goodness and joy, and as I said last week God is in the midst of all life, if only we can see and hear the words and his presence.

The Church and our faith have much wisdom to share let us hope that the promise of God is not overshadowed by the exploits of those who cannot see the wisdom of God as both Simeon and Anna witnessed. We need to discern God's agenda for us here in this parish at this time of change working alongside all people of good will and embracing the hope so clear in the life of Simeon and Anna.

Amen.