

## **The Presentation of Christ in the Temple - 2nd February 2025**

**Luke 2, 22-40**

### **A Sermon by Corinne Craymer**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I wonder if you've ever stopped to think about HOPE. To think about its power in our lives. Hope is about longing, resilience, prayer, and patient waiting, and is a powerful force even in very hard times. It tells us that nothing stays the same forever, and it can be an amazing source of comfort. It's not just wishful thinking but a deep belief in what is possible.

I hope you have an easy time at the dentist. I hope the weather is fine for the fete. She hopes her son will pass his exams. He hopes he'll feel better by next week. We hope one day to see our Lord face to face.

A new baby fills us with future hope that life goes on.

When I held my grandson Toby for the first time the night he was born, I knew that as a grandmother I would have hopes for him. I felt so blessed that I was, and am, full of hope that I can support him to grow into the future God wills for him.

Mary and Joseph have new responsibilities and new hopes. As Jesus' parents they are bound by the religious covenant of the day. In the temple in Jerusalem Mary is to be purified and offer two pigeons as atonement for her sins. She and Joseph cannot afford a more expensive lamb, and she hopes that Jesus, her firstborn male son, is to be designated as holy to God.

They have to take Jesus to the temple to fulfil a religious ritual every bit as familiar to them as Baptism is to us today. Today Jews celebrate a child's birth with a ceremony of prayer, song and social events. Muslims do likewise with a statement of faith whispered into the ear of the baby. And in our faith a service of thanksgiving may be followed by a family celebration and Baptism.

On this holy day in our gospel reading, Mary and Joseph hope to see the priest but have no idea that their little baby boy will be greeted by two older people who have been faithful to God for a very long time and who now amaze them. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Simeon takes the baby in his arms and declares for all the world to hear that his hopes are fulfilled: he has now seen God's long promised salvation. He cannot know this through any human knowing. He holds in his arms the light of the world and

our Saviour. He has hoped for this all his life since the Holy Spirit revealed God's plan to him.

And then the hopes of eighty-four years old Anna are also fulfilled as she confirms for the world that here is the long-expected Redeemer. She cannot know this but through the power of The Holy Spirit.

We know what Simeon and Anna didn't fully know: the unfolding story of our redemption, that is Christ's earthly life and ministry, his death and resurrection. We have also learned about God's plan through the gospels, through the church and through our own experiences of God.

These prayerful prophets simply persevered in their trust that God would save us all. Yet for all this, Simeon is about to give Mary the most devastating news she will ever hear. Prompted again by the Holy Spirit he utters those terrible words that no mother ever wants to hear. 'Your Son will be opposed, and many will fall and rise because of him. Your soul will be pierced as by a sword'.

We may feel that we have never needed God so much as we do today in a world that seems so lacking in wisdom. Simeon and Anna persevere in their prayers and hopes and are rewarded as they finally see God's answer. Simeon's song of praise has echoed down the ages revealing hope realised. 'Now Lord you are dismissing your servant in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.'

Simeon and Anna have not only shown us the importance and value of older people in society but the place and value of Christian hope. It seems quite easy for society to overlook older people, of which I'm one. Older people have so much to share with us. We need to listen to their wisdom and the experiences they have had to bring much needed hope into lives. And each one of us, whatever age we are, can offer the hope of Christianity to the world. Because our hope actually transforms the world.

Today's story has been about waiting and praying, hoping and listening for God's answer. Doubting is part of our human condition. Waiting can be very hard. Simeon and Anna had waited their entire lifetime to be rewarded for their patience. And often in the waiting we encounter doubt. When we doubt, it is not that we have lost faith, it is more that we are searching for God in a deeper way. We want to understand who God is and what he has done for us and actually it is through doubt that we learn. If Galileo had not doubted that we lived on a flat earth, astronomy would not have progressed.

We should pause after all our festivities to give thanks to God, just as Simeon and Anna gave thanks. We should give thanks for the gifts of hope and faith. Because that's what

hope is - a gift from God. We can unwrap this gift slowly as the year goes on and patiently recognise its significance – which is our very salvation.

Let us pray.

Lord God, you have ordered our lives so that we walk by faith and hope and not by certainty. Help us to persevere as we carry on through good times and difficult times, through childhood, youth, middle age and older age, holding onto your promise to us of forgiveness and a final place in your kingdom of love. Amen.