

## Depart in peace

29 1 12

Almighty and ever-living God, clothed in majesty:  
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple  
in substance of our flesh;  
grant that we may be presented to you,  
with pure and clean hearts  
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

My text is from today's gospel according to Luke, chapter 2 and verse 30:

**'For my eyes have seen your salvation. '**

Today, five days early, we are marking the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple or, if you prefer, Candlemas, thereby bringing to a close a series of sermons on the theme of Epiphany - God revealed to us.

In last week's sermon in which Jesus changed water into wine, I mentioned the fact that his mother Mary was one of the people who would have surely known that the miracle had actually taken place. Mary had confidence in her son, confidence in whom he was and in what he was and in what he could do. Her confidence was not disappointed. Mary knew that Jesus was special. The Annunciation to her by the angel, Gabriel, told her as much. The Annunciation to Joseph by an angel in a dream told her as much. Her greeting by her cousin Elizabeth when she went to stay with her, told her as much. The visit by the

shepherds to the stable of an inn where her baby was lying in a manger, told her as much. The visit by the three wise men with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, told her as much. And now with Jesus 40 days old, Mary and Joseph have taken their first-born boy to the Temple to make the required sacrifice for the in thanksgiving for his birth as prescribed by the Law – a sacrifice of two turtle doves or two young pigeons. There Mary's encounter first with Simeon then with Anna told her as much.

Time and space in my sermons are necessarily limited so forgive me if today I concentrate just on Simeon and save Anna for next year's Candlemas sermon!

Simeon was already an old man, living in Jerusalem. He is described by Luke as **righteous and devout**. Great adjectives to describe someone. **Righteous** (δικαιος – dikaios) is what every good Jew would seek to be – in good standing with regards to his obedience to the Torah, the 613 commandments of God to his Chosen People, the Jews. **Devout** (ευλαβησ – eulabes) means he was faithful and duly diligent in his worship of the living God and living a life informed by an awareness of the presence of the spirit of God with him.

Simeon was a man at the end of his life who had been promised something special: that before he died, he would see with his own eyes the promised Messiah. For an old man, it was a promise that must have given him a good reason to live – for Simeon, there was a point to go on living.

That day when the holy family was at the Temple in Jerusalem, Simeon was prompted to go there by the Holy Spirit. He did and he was not disappointed because there he met Mary and Joseph and the infant Jesus. He took the boy in his arms and he prophesied – a text we know as the ‘Nunc Dimittis’ one of my favourite pieces from the Bible set to music for the Anglican service of Evensong, a version of which I’m going to play that the end of my sermon.

His prophesy is revolutionary and exciting, shocking and uncomfortable. Necessarily, I quote from the Book of Common Prayer:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace:  
according to thy word:  
for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,  
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people:  
to be a light to lighten the Gentiles,  
and to be the glory of thy people Israel. (2 v 29 – 32)

Simeon says he can now die in peace because God had kept his promise to him and he has witnessed with his own eyes and held in his own arms the promised source of salvation for Gentiles and for Jews alike. Not what you’d expect to hear in the Temple at that time. But on a personal note, Simeon tells Mary that ‘a sword will pierce your own soul too’. The sorrows of the Virgin are part of praying the rosary. Here Simeon uses the image of a sword to suggest the pain Mary will feel because she is the mother of our Lord and the shameful, painful way we will treat her son will wound her spirit just as surely as if a sword were to pierce her flesh.

So today we have come to a climax of the series of sermons on God revealing himself to us. Here, it is Simeon who accurately prophesises that Jesus is the promised salvation of our God so let me leave you with this setting of his words by Geoffrey Burgeon.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

*29<sup>th</sup> January, 2012*

H: Sermon 25: Depart

