

Luke 2: 22-40

Mary and Joseph go to the temple to dedicate Jesus, and Simeon prophecies that this boy is the awaited Christ, and that a sword would pierce Mary's soul. Then the widow Anna comes along and begins to praise God and tell others about the boy.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

COCU6B Christmas 1 RCL Readings

This year the first Sunday after Christmas is a celebration of the moment when Jesus was presented in the Temple. Simeon's prophecy over the baby is a profound and disturbing word about the way Jesus exposes the truth of our hearts. It calls us to reflection, repentance and a commitment to a whole new way of being.

All the readings reflect God's desire to make God's self known to humanity, to bring salvation to women and men, and to bring us into relationship with God.

In a world of sound bites and spin doctors, it can be tough to get to truth. In this environment, God's self-revelation may seem to be irrelevant and the idea that God can expose the truth of human hearts can seem like delusional fantasy. However, Simeon's prophecy about Christ goes to the truth of human sinfulness, and what we need for redemption. Simeon praises Jesus as the "light to the Gentiles", that shows salvation to the world.

Of course, when we examine the crises of our world in the light of Jesus' message of God's Reign, we easily see that what Jesus revealed is exactly what we need to address our problems. That God would be revealed in a child of modest station, who, in sharing in a basic human ritual, identifies with all of humanity, speaks volumes about the kind of order that God seeks to bring into the world - one of community, collaboration and compassion, as opposed to competition, consumption and individualism.

In addition, the ultimate test of human hearts is to see how we respond when faced with the challenging principles of God's Reign. Here is where our greed and hunger for power, our fear and insecurity, our arrogance and cold-heartedness is exposed in stark relief. No matter what spin we may sell to ourselves and others, Simeon was right - Christ reveals the true state of our hearts. In a world where we desperately need to get past our personal and national agendas to find common ground and co-operative ways to solve our world's problems, the mirror that Christ holds up to us, and the world he preached and demonstrated in his simple, sacrificial life, are powerful and creative resources. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3

God will show all nations God's justice, and Zion will be saved and will blaze with God's glory.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, God has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

This passage is pieced together from two sections focused on two different entities, making it a challenging read. At first a human individual speaks of his or her own renewal - the self is compared to both a bridegroom and a bride - and of God's expected deeds among the nations. But attention shifts in 62:1 away from the individual and toward the city itself, personified as a woman and called both Zion and Jerusalem, as it is throughout Second Isaiah. In verses 2-3 the feminine singular pronouns describing Zion shift to 2nd person, addressing her directly. Since verses 2 and 3 speak of "the Lord," in the 3rd person, verse 1 is likewise probably meant to be read as prophetic speech - it is the prophet who won't sit still till Zion's restoration is revealed. Throughout the passage, "righteousness" is by no means a narrow term, as in "self-righteousness," but an expression of overflowing goodness, originating from God, transforming the world, visible to all, a new order entirely, ushered in along with justice, praise for God, and divine glory. *(Patricia Tull, Working Preacher)*

Psalms 148

A psalm calling all creation and all people to praise God, for God's greatness, and for strengthening God's people.

Praise the Lord!

Praise God from the heavens; praise God in the heights!

Praise God, all God's angels; praise God, all God's host!

Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars!

Praise God, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

**Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for God commanded and they were created.**

God established them forever and ever;

God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike, old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for God's name alone is exalted; God's glory is above earth and heaven.

God has raised up a horn for God's people, praise for all God's faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to God. **Praise the Lord!**

Galatians 4:4-7

At the right time God sent God's son to become human, born of a woman, and now God has given us God's Spirit by which we can know intimacy with God as with a parent.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

A church council meeting in Ephesus in 431 A.D. considered this passage (and others) in its theological deliberations regarding Mary. The consensus reached by this Third Ecumenical Council was that Mary is properly called theotokos (Greek for "God-bearer"). But this passage is less about the relationship of Christ's humanity and divinity, and more about the believer's relationship with God through Christ. Now, that faith has come, we are no longer slaves serving a tough taskmaster (the law). Instead, we are God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. Consequently, as adopted sons and daughters, we do what children do (call their father Abba - "Daddy" for instance) and receive what children receive: blessing and inheritance.