

Presentation (2025)

Inflation, whether it be with currency or something else, devalues.

Take, for example, photos. When I was a boy, we had a Kodak Brownie Hawkeye. If my memory serves me, there were eight exposures on a roll of 620 film, the film used in that camera.

Some years later for Christmas I got an Instamatic. You could take up to 24 pictures. Wow!

Even so, you were limited in the number of pictures you could snap. Film was expensive, as was getting it developed. So, you didn't just shoot everything you saw multiple times, as people today do with their digital cameras or phones.

Nor were an infinite number of pictures stored in the ‘cloud’ (the majority of which will never be seen or remembered). Rather, if you were enterprising, a select few were placed in an album.

Well, this is what Luke does in chapter 2 of his Gospel. He puts select snapshots of Jesus’ early life, no doubt collected from His mother, in an ‘album’. He selects four.

The first of Jesus’ birth. We are all familiar with this one. It’s pulled out regularly at Christmas time: **“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed . . .”**

The second snapshot is of His circumcision and naming on the eighth day of His birth. In the church year, we pay special attention of this ‘photo’ on January 1 . . . the Feast of the

Circumcision, as it is designated in the Prayer Book.

But Luke is not through. He has two more pictures of Jesus' early life to place in his album.

The third is of His presentation in the Temple and the ritual purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is the one that we are pulling out today.

The fourth is the one we pulled out two weeks ago on the Second Sunday after Epiphany. It is of Jesus at age 12 going to the Temple and getting separated from His family

No doubt, we would like to have more photos of Jesus' early life, but these are the ones we are given, which makes them all the more precious. No inflation here!

Luke, acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has put them in his album for our learning. They represent significant moments in Jesus's early life, including the one given to us in today's Gospel.

Here, we find Mary and Joseph being obedient to the Law of Moses, which laid down that every first-born male child belonged to the LORD. His parents could only obtain his release from temple or other direct service by paying the priest a sum of money.

Mary and Joseph acknowledged this obligation and did as the Law directed.

On the same day, there was a ceremony for the child's mother . . . her 'purification'. On the 40th day after a child's birth, she would offer a sacrifice – in Mary's case a pair of pigeons – and the priest would give her a blessing. Then, the family was free to return to ordinary life.

In our Anglican tradition we have what is perhaps a remnant of this Old Testament practice. In the Prayer Book, there is service entitled “The Thanksgiving of Women after child-birth, commonly called The Churching of Women.” When you have some extra time on your hands, you might want to look it up. It is found on page 305.

Returning to this morning’s Gospel, our Lord’s Presentation was anything but routine. Two other characters, both highly significant to the story, burst onto the stage: **Simeon** and **Anna**.

These two, both devout and elderly, recognize the infant Jesus as God’s Anointed, the Messiah.

It was Simeon who gave us the canticle we say or sing in Evening Prayer beginning with the words: “**Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word . . .**”

We know this canticle by its Latin name, *Nunc dimittis*.

Furthermore, it is from a phrase in Simeon's spontaneous hymn that we get another name for this day: **Candlemas**.

This designation derives its inspiration from the line that says: **“a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel.”**

Simeon perceived that Jesus came to bring light not just to God's old covenant people, but to all people. That, of course, is a reoccurring theme in Epiphany, the season in which we now find ourselves.

Back in the '90s on this day, I attended an evening service at Westminster Abby.

At the end, we were given candles which were lit and carried in procession. As we processed, the choir sang the *Nunc Demittis*.

Lifting up our candles was a vivid reminder that Jesus is the light of the world and that as His people we are called to be reflectors of that light.

We need this reminder. After all, there is so much darkness in our world, pertaining both to things that are demonstratively destructive to individuals and society . . . as well as things that *just happen*, like the plane and helicopter collision this past week.

We are called to bear witness to the God who purposes to put all things right in Christ . . . to the God who, according to Revelation 21, will at some point wipe away all tears and bring about new heavens and a new earth.

Do we understand all of God's purposes? /// No, but we still have the promises made to us in scripture and supremely in Jesus, and thus reason for hope.

I am reminded of something Lesslie Newbigin, a British theologian and missionary, once said. Asked if he was an optimist or a pessimist, he responded: **“I am neither an optimist nor a pessimist. /// Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!”**

That, my brothers and sisters, is our reason for hope. That is the source of our light. That is the candle we lift up.

As you go out the door each day, pray for opportunities to pass on that light. Seek them, and they will come. You will not be disappointed.

I have just mentioned the two faithful souls who were in the Temple on the day of our

Lord's presentation. They were light-bearers for sure. Among other things, we can learn from them the importance of the one or the two. Allow me to explain.

As the New Testament narrative continues, we discover that the Temple was under judgment. Instead of being a house of prayer, it had become a place of merchandise.

More than that, following Jesus' death, judgment fell on the Temple in the form of its destruction. In A.D. 70, the armies of Rome leveled it to the ground.

Yet -- and this is my point -- even in the midst of apostasy and coming judgment, there were at least two souls bearing faithful witness in that place.

Their words of recognition and prophecy about Jesus not only strengthen Mary and Joseph but were likely overheard by others. The

fire of excitement and expectation was kindled in their hearts as well.

So, never underestimate the importance of the one or the two.

I am reminded of a story. A few years ago a layman in another state called me. He was in a church where there wasn't much light . . . the teaching from the pulpit was dismal and heterodox. He wanted to know if he should leave this church.

As we talked further, he said he taught an adult Sunday School class and was trying to be a light in that place

Hearing this, I asked: **“If you left, who would tend those sheep?”**

I'm not certain what he decided to do, but I have a feeling he did not abandon those sheep,

at least until he was sure they were no longer in danger.

What he was doing in that place was keeping a light burning.

And, in a sense, that is what Anna and Simeon were doing in the Temple. They were keeping God's flame burning in a place that was already under judgment.

Never underestimate the importance and power of the one or the two. **“Brighten the corner where you are,”** to quote an old Gospel song.

Simeon that day gave a prophecy concerning Jesus. He said He would bring blessing to some, destruction to others: **“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel.”**

What did he mean by those words? /// He seems to have been saying that some would

receive Jesus' message and the blessings associated with it, while others would reject it and suffer the dreadful consequences of their unbelief.

Anna, likewise, bore witness to Jesus and His divine mission that day. She went around the Temple court pointing people to the Holy Child, saying, in effect, **“Pay attention to Him.”**

Just two, but what light their candles put off. Learn from them. Hold up your candle in the place God has placed you. Leave the results to Him.

In so doing, at the end of life's day you will be able to say with aged Simeon: **“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.”**

After that, hear our Lord's words, **“Welcome home. Well done!”**