

Jesus' Presentation in Jerusalem - Luke 2:22-40 - by Veronica Garcia-Robles

Two days ago, we celebrated the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ on Christmas! And, on Christmas and Christmas Eve, many people celebrate the season with various family traditions, just as the church celebrates the season of Advent with many church traditions. Pre-pandemic times, for example, the children of our church would look forward to celebrating the season of Advent with the annual Christmas Party before performing the annual Nativity Play the next day for the congregation. Much earlier in the year, the kids would enjoy marching with their crosses bearing palms and singing on Palm Sunday, and they would enjoy decorating the cross at the front of the church with flowers during the Easter service. Meanwhile, the adults in the congregation, would enjoy many other traditions as well, such as having a potluck meal together on Harvest Sunday, or the tradition of giving something up for the season of lent, or making the sign of the cross with ashes on one's forehead for Ash Wednesday, or singing together during church or during special services like the Carols by Candlelight service, or the presentation of children for baptism, or the eating and drinking of bread and wine together during Holy Communion. Traditions are an important part of the church. They help build our community and make us stronger and closer to one another and to God...traditions are often imbedded with deep meanings, whether we realize it or not.

Today's gospel touches on a very old tradition that has roots all the way to the Law of Moses, the laws of Judaism, in which a family's firstborn child is brought for presentation in the Temple in Jerusalem, to be consecrated to God, made holy and therefore redeemed. Mary and Joseph, brought the baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem for his presentation, to consecrate him to God. This story tells us that Jesus' roots are deeply planted in God's law...that by observing this tradition, they are commemorating an old memory of the deliverance of Israel from the final plague that caused the deaths of the firstborn in Egypt, back in the time of Moses. This presentation of the firstborn had roots tied all the way back to that awful memory...but the church tradition of presenting the firstborn child at the Temple wasn't just to remember that...it was also a way for the community who had experienced that shared trauma to find its way back towards God...to something good. As I see it, the tradition was meant to help heal the community...to consecrate, to make holy, to redeem their children to their almighty God who led them out of slavery and into the promised land. Therefore, even though the church tradition evoked such a terrible memory in the community, the tradition, at its heart, is about hope and the act of commending their child into the arms of God...showing their trust and love for God in the act of presenting their child to Him.

Now, today's gospel reading tells us that two people interacted with Mary, Joseph and Jesus that day: Simeon and Anna. Both were prophets, old, devout,

and righteous. Simeon had spent his entire life looking for, what the gospel says, was the consolation of Israel...the salvation of Israel. For many years, both Simeon and Anna were concerned and prayed for their people, their nation. They were old enough to remember the Jewish revolt against the Romans, the destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of their beloved Temple. Their people, Israel, had that traumatic memory and for many years they had been crying out for a savior...for one who would bring them justice and lead them into a better day. God rewarded both Simeon and Anna, their many years of waiting, their devout prayer and worship, when He revealed that He would let them see the Messiah, the savior, that day in the Temple. And, while Anna would praise God and spoke to everyone seeking salvation about Jesus, Simeon declared that Jesus would be the salvation, not just for some, but for all people, Jews and Gentiles. And, he further prophesied that Jesus was “destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, to be a sign that will be opposed” in order that “the inner thoughts of many will be revealed”...Meaning that Jesus’ light would reveal who people truly are, and many would fall while others would rise.

And finally, when Jesus’ presentation at the Temple was done, Mary and Joseph took Jesus back home to Galilee, where the bible tells us that He grew strong, was filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.

While this is a beautiful and important gospel story about Jesus' childhood, one of the main points that Luke, the writer of our gospel, wants to get across to his readers is that Jesus is very much rooted in the traditions of the Jewish law. Jesus is rooted in the traditions of the church. They are important to him and his family. And following those traditions that are imbedded with so much meaning, invoke and create so many memories, forges a deep bond between Jesus and his family with God and His church. Luke wants us to know that God and the church are very important to Jesus.

How important is your faith, your bond with God and His church? Where does God fit in your life? What helps feed and nourish your faith, your connection to God? Church traditions can absolutely help nourish our faith. Think about those traditions in our church that you love to partake in. What memories and emotions are invoked in you, when you think of them? What deeper biblical memories are they tied to or invoke? The season of Lent, for example, is tied to the biblical memory of Jesus surviving in the wilderness for 40 days and nights. The children marching with their palms and singing on Palm Sunday are tied to the memory of Jesus entering Jerusalem triumphantly on a donkey while people cheered and waved and lay palms on the ground before him. Baptisms are tied to the memory of Jesus being baptized by the John the Baptist in the River Jordan, and in so doing being claimed as God's son. Holy Communion is tied to the memory of Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper.

These traditions that we share as community strengthen us as a family, as one body in Christ Jesus. And, as both Simeon and Anna told all who were waiting for consolation, for redemption, for salvation, for hope for a brighter future...Jesus is that hope!

In times of darkness and despair, Jesus is our light. In times of desolation, loss and confusion, Jesus is our consolation. In those moments that are traumatic and terrible, Jesus is our savior. In those moments when we cannot even love ourselves, Jesus is our redeemer. Simeon and Anna saw God in the eyes of a baby that day and praised God, because they knew God had not forgotten them or any of his people. God did not forget his people then and God has not forgotten us now. Even though we as a world have collectively been undergoing so many difficulties, losses, hardships and tragedies because of this pandemic and the many other problems in our world, God has not forgotten us. God is with us in all of this...He walks with us because he was one of us, a fact that we all celebrate every year on Christmas because that was the moment God was among us in the flesh.

For God so loved the world, that he sent his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

God is with us, whether we are gathered here in this church or at a distance in our homes through this broadcast. Because the church is not and never has been a building...the church is a people. The fact that for most of this year, we

have not been able to gather within these church walls to worship God, does not make us any less of a church. We are the church and God lives in us. In our thoughts, in our actions, in our prayers, in our lives. Who we are, how we live and act, especially towards one another, matter to God, because we are the church as we walk through this world, each on our own journeys. How we use our spiritual gifts and our talents matter to God, because, as Christians, we are children of God, loved and saved by the sacrifice made by our Lord, Jesus Christ on the cross.

Advent is a time of waiting. Simeon and Anna waited to see God. We waited during Advent and on Christmas we celebrated the birth of Jesus. But, the thing is, Jesus is here now. We are standing in the light of Jesus. He is present in our world and his light reveals any darkness that may be in or surrounding us...this gives us an opportunity, now as we approach the end of this year, for us to look inside ourselves and take stock of our lives...to give thanks for the blessings in our lives and to be honest with ourselves about where we are lacking and ask for God's forgiveness and to be put once again on a right path...the path that Jesus has made for us...one that redeems and leads us back to God...where we who were once lost are found again...and can run into the loving arms of our God...so we too can be presented to the Lord for redemption. The next service we will have will be in a brand new year. Let's open our arms to God and take the hand of Christ as he leads us into a new

future, full of light and promise, just as God led his people so long ago to the promised land. Amen.