

Presentation of the Lord - 2020
Yearly Readings Malachi 3.1-4///Heb.2.14-18///Luke 2.22-40

→40 days have passed since Christmas and today is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord....once every 7 years we get to celebrate this feast on a Sunday.

→and today, we hear the gospel account of our Lord's visit to the Temple forty days after his birth

→Mary and Joseph, being devout Jews, bring the infant Jesus from the stable nursery in Bethlehem to what was then, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

→there among the huge stone walls and spacious open-air porticos, Mary and Joseph present their child to God...offering the sacrifice of two young pigeons...the sacrifice of the poor...

→and as it happens Simeon and Anna are both present....two people who were looking and hoping for the coming of the savior

→Simeon holds the baby Jesus in his arms and says to his mother... *"Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, to be a sign that will be contradicted"*

→[now] what an incredible thing to say to a mother concerning her new-born child...[and] imagine her reaction if you will....

→.....those of you who are parents, how would you like to be told something like that as you bring your child into church....in essence....to be baptized and be told....this child...your child...is destined for trouble

→I'm sure Mary and Joseph must have been shocked by such words...

→and....being familiar with rest of the story of Jesus' life, we all know [of course,] just how accurate that prophesy proved to be!

→the opposition to Mary's son became so intense that it resulted in his crucifixion,--his being put to death---before he reaching his mid-thirties

→[in a certain sense]...it is utterly amazing that people could **be so against** a person like Jesus that they felt the need to kill him

PAUSE

→[especially] because today, in our time and place, public sentiment about Jesus Christ [for the most part] seems to flow strongly in the opposite direction

→it is difficult today....to find anyone who is openly opposed to Jesus

→on the contrary, the vast majority of people, ourselves included, hold him in highest of esteem: we celebrate his birth /// we extol his virtues /// we admire his deeds /// we praise his teachings

→almost **everyone** has something good to say about Jesus

→and so....perhaps the question we need to ask and explore is: what makes us so different than the people of 1st century

→after all WE applaud his merits while the people back then...put him to death

→[and] to find our answer, I think we need to explore just who those people were that opposed Jesus.

---in the N>T>....they are identified mainly as the Pharisees and the Sadducees

→they were the main "religious" groups that primarily disagreed with Jesus on points of doctrine and teaching

→THEY were also very patriotic and so ----their opposition to Jesus was rooted in both their religious beliefs and their patriotism

→back then there was very little distinction between the two

→to be religious was to be patriotic, and to be patriotic was to be religious....and Jesus, by his words and actions.....offended them on BOTH COUNTS

→for the Pharisees and Sadducees....it was a matter of keeping the rules and observing the law

→and if you didn't.....then you were wrong

→but JESUS saw beyond all that.....for him life was a matter of faith

→and.....trust and honesty and the goodness of each human person and their relationship to God and to others was what mattered

→for the Pharisees and the Sadducees....this way of thinking was seen as being in opposition to the law... in their eyes, Jesus was violating God's law and betraying his very own nation

→[and] so they were against him....forget his message, his compassion, his extolling of the human spirit, his caring for people

→in their eyes, he was breaking the rules **and** he needed to be punished for it

→now we can say...well that was then, and this is today.....

→who can be is against Jesus **today** and what he stood for and taught

→BUT look at our world today and we can't help but witness the senseless destruction of human life, the wastefulness of our resources, the lack of regard for the environment...the earth...human life

→and we can ask --who could be against Jesus?

→think about the violence in our world and communities...street gangs, crime, domestic violence, capital punishment, the persecution of so many people because of what they believe, what they profess, what they stand for.....and ask --who could be against Jesus?

→witness our continued disregard for innocent human life...abortions, injustice, discrimination, inequality, the comments and jokes, and remarks about anyone and everyone who may be different, or think differently or live differently ...and ask...--who could be against Jesus?

→witness the unfairness of society...the haves and the have-nots, the poverty, the ever growing lack of kindness, compassion and patience among people...and ask....----who could be against Jesus?

→without a doubt...the time and place may be different ---1st century to today--- but in many ways the opposition to Christ and his message is still very much alive and real

→and so maybe the real message and challenge for us on this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is to realize just exactly what's going on...that in some ways...it's no different today than at the time when Jesus walked the earth....and more importantly to decide to do something about it.....to make some small changes right here at home in our lives and attitudes and words.....

→to make some changes in how we live out what we believe, what we profess, what we stand for

PAUSE

→a long ago....a man named Simeon held a little baby in his arms and said...*"this child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel - a sign that will be opposed"*

→and the truth of that strange statement has been written very large on the pages of history

→Jesus was opposed by his own generation...and in some respect.....by every generation since then....and sadly that opposition remains ever present even today

→and...on this day.....you and I are once again confronted with that very same statement made by Simeon centuries ago....*"who could be against Jesus?"*

→and as we gather around this table today, and every Sunday.....perhaps we each need to look into our own heart and soul.....to reflect on our own lives.....to look at our own attitudes and thoughts.....and truly ask ourselves....

→"could it be me"