

Feast of the Presentation of Christ  
St. Luke 2:22-40  
February 2nd, 2020  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## **The Child**

The Presentation of Jesus in the temple marks the official close of the Christmass season of feasting and celebration. We give thanks for the many gifts we have received in this season past, not just on Christmass morning.

Today we are giving thanks for the child given to us.  
That child is God.  
We are given that child.  
We come to the temple today to give thanks for the gift of this child to us.

Mary and Joseph went to the Temple in Jerusalem to present their first born child, this gift of God giving them God's self. Two pigeons would have likely been the offering that they could afford. They also brought their hearts to give thanks.

Those who were Holy people, people who spent a good deal of their day praying and being in the Temple, also knew to give thanks when they saw this special child brought into this holy place. They were both of a great age. First there was Simeon. He had waited a lifetime to lay his eyes upon this child. He had hoped against hope that he would be privileged to see the Messiah. Now that he had seen Him, his life was complete. He is ready to depart this world and be with God in peace. Then there was Anna, a Prophet. Her piety and purity were unquestionable. She was a very Holy person. She also spoke of the importance of the child and this moment to all who would listen gathered in the Temple. Both were overwhelmed to see the long standing prophecies and promise of God fulfilled before their eyes. And they knew the truth of it at once.

Mary and Joseph completed the task of presenting Jesus in the Temple and went to settle in the humble region of the Galilee. The text notes that "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." The good parenting and stewardship of Mary and Joseph accomplished this.

Some of us have also raised children. We want to be good parents. But I would also observe that there is a child within each of us. We have heard references to this child in popular literature as well as the writings of psychology.

This child is very real and is a part of every one of us. This child still roams around inside us, looking for opportunities to play and get outside. We often suppress this child, but it also has its good, valuable points for our spiritual well being. It loves to have fun. It

has a sense of wonder. It loves easily. It is full of life and hopes and dreams. It is trusting of those it encounters and thinks the best of them, whether peer or parent.

Our older selves, for whatever reason, are reluctant to let this child show itself in the present. We are afraid we will be embarrassed by it. Our mature adult selves suppress the childish urges and thinking, substituting suspicion, cynicism and disbelief for the wonder. We call this adulthood and maturity. In a way, it is a tragedy. We fear seeing the world through the eyes of a trusting child, because we are influenced by the skepticism learned from experience. We protect ourselves from being hurt or disappointed, or so we think.

Yet our spiritual pilgrimage is a process of rediscovering this child, accepting it and embracing it and allowing it to get out and show itself. It is a process of preparing to present this child to the world and integrate its finest qualities into the adults we have become. We will be impoverished if we lose our sense of wonder, joy, playfulness, trust and love of those around us. We have nothing to fear if we present our child to the world.

There is always thankfulness for the safe delivery of a new child into this life. People used to go to church and offer a prayer of thanks for that. There was even a service for "Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child" in the 1928 Prayer Book, since deleted from newer editions. It is always a good custom to give thanks, especially for the birth of a newborn child. We should also thank God more for the blessings we receive each day of our lives. The gift of the life of a new child is cause for great joy and celebration. It is full of hope and dreams and so much potential. And when it is a first-born child, for the first time we are drawn out of ourselves as the center of our lives and into protecting and minding the life of the vulnerable infant. For the first time, someone else's life is more important than our own. We are ready to give our own life to protect the child before us. Imagine how God must feel about each one of us. Imagine a God who makes our lives more important than God's. That is true parental love in spades. God did so and showed us on the cross.

The child is presented in the temple by his parents. That child is God.

Today we are given that child. We come to the temple today to give thanks for the gift of this child to us. If this is a child given to us, we have become parents to this little child. It is a huge role reversal. How will we parent the Christ child born inside of us?

Indeed, will we nurture this child? How will we do that? Will we pay attention to the small voice inside us crying to us? Will we love this child as much as we love ourselves? Will we allow this child to grow to be strong and wise in us? Will we be good parents and not abandon this small child? Will we put this child ahead of our own needs and desires, making the welfare of this child a priority?

Parenting the Christ Child. Mary and Joseph were very careful. They made the long journey to Egypt to protect him. They quietly raised him in the traditions of his people. When Jesus was ready to begin His public ministry, he presented himself ready at the Jordan River.

Parenting the child within us is our spiritual journey. Staying in touch with the inner child whose motives are clear and whose vision of others is pure, unshaded by skepticism and cynicism. With that child we can look to the world God created with wonder and joy and gratefulness and most of all, love. The world is a place of discovery of this wonderful creation.

I have read with interest the writings of scientists who are people of faith. Without reservation, they find the complexity of creation and its interconnectedness only possible through a creator, not by an accident. While the task of science is to understand, discover and explain this creation, it is also hard to wrap your mind around how it all works together and why it does. Faith accomplishes this. The wonder of the child in them inspires the scientists to explore and discover. I have never found science and my religion at odds with one another. We can believe with the simplicity and purity of a child. We have nothing to fear. This is a faith we need to rediscover.

In a week or so we will be celebrating the feast of St. Valentine, at least in spirit. More than a greeting card creation, this is a day and a month when the importance of love becomes paramount, and expressing that love to those close to us is of first priority. February is a month about love, but not just the romantic relationship sort, but also the love between parents and children and also the love of siblings and then the love between friends. It is something to give thanks for when you have it, and when you lack it, to strive to give yours away to others rather than demand it back from them, as strangely, that's how it works.

Today we witness again the love of Mary and Joseph for their child. That love inspires us to nurture the child within us and to prepare to present those child-like qualities to the world. Then will we be thankful like Mary and Joseph on receiving the gift of new life. So today we are thankful on receiving the gift of the Christ Child in Bethlehem along with Anna and Simeon, a child still given to each of us. AMEN