

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's the second day of February, a significant date for a number of reasons. It's Groundhog Day. Also, I hear Super Bowl Sunday, strange game. But for us in church, it's the Feast of Candlemas, otherwise known as the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple. It's a feast we always celebrate 40 days after Christmas. It marks the end of the season of Epiphany and also the halfway point between Christmas and Easter. And the essential character in the gospel set for today is a man called Simeon, and this is the only time he appears in the whole Bible, but he makes one appearance with a great impact. He arrives with something of a bang.

Do you notice how many times the Holy Spirit is mentioned as Simeon appears? We're told the Holy Spirit rested on him. Then the Spirit revealed to him that he'd see the Messiah and the Spirit guided him to the temple. In three verses when Simeon first appears in the gospel, in those three verses, there are three references to the Holy Spirit. That's indicative of something significant happening here, but just look at what happens in the temple. Simeon takes a baby in his arms and prays. Nothing particularly out of the ordinary about that. The temple would have been full of people coming and going, and I reckon none of them noticed simple couple with their baby praying with an old man in the corner. None of them would believe that 2,000 years later, we're still talking today in church about what happened in the temple all those years ago. The Holy Spirit was working there quietly and powerfully, even though in a way that the people who were in the temple on the day might not have noticed.

And this is not uncommon in my experience, God's Spirit can move amongst us, his people, powerfully and without a fuss. There's not always drama when God comes amongst his people, which leads me to mention the prayers that we offer in the chapel after or during communion each week when the communion is being distributed, which is something that both Rebecca and I love to do. We

keep it simple. We ask the Holy Spirit to join us, and in whatever situation is named by the person who comes for prayer. It's not dramatic, but I hope there's something of a Simeon effect going on. We've heard the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon. That's my prayer that what we do in the chapel is inviting God's Spirit to rest on whoever comes to pray.

Let's move on to what Simeon said. He called the Baby Jesus, who he was holding in his arms, a light for revelation to the Gentiles or nations, as other translations say. And of course he's not alone in naming Jesus as the light. John's Gospel begins with John calling Jesus the light of all people. Jesus himself said, as I mentioned last week, "I am the light of the world. Whomever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Light reveals. We all know that dreadful experience of getting stuck in a darkened room, fumbling around, bumping into things, not being able to find the way out. When the lights go out, we can't see things clearly. We can't see the way forward.

The coming of Jesus is God making himself known to light up the world, to show us the way. That's what we celebrate in this season of Epiphany, which means to make manifest, to reveal. What we celebrate in this season is the light of Christ coming into the world to light up the world. God coming as one of us. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it in our reading, "Like us in every respect; shared our flesh and blood." This was God revealing himself to the world.

The revelation of God in Christ is for all people, which is why the season of Epiphany begins with the visit of the wise men to the Baby Jesus in the stable. The wise men who were Gentiles. Their presence at the birth of Jesus represents the fact that God came in Christ for the whole world, for all people, not just the people of Israel.

Light reveals, it also exposes. Simeon recognizes this too. He says to Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and 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." And we see here how Simeon stands in the middle, is the bridge between Christmas and Easter. As he holds the Baby Jesus in his arms, he points forward to the bitterness of the cross. He acknowledges that the coming of Jesus exposes the sin that lurks in the darkness.

I went to a golf range over Christmas holiday with a friend of mine and I should say that in my mind, my golf swing is a thing of beauty. My back stays straight. My wrists come back at just the perfect angle, my follow through is sweet. My friend videoed me and reveal to me as I watched the video, the full horror of my swing. In the darkness of my imagination, I had deluded myself. And the extent of my delusion was revealed in the light of the video. The video couldn't make my swing any better. It just showed how bad it was.

The coming of the light of Christ both exposes our failings and also offers a way of dealing with them. When we come into the light of Christ, we can dare to examine our failings in the full confidence that on the cross Jesus has acted to take away the burden of those failings. Quoting the reading from Hebrews again, "he made a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people."

Last, I want to mention Simeon's great sense of fulfillment, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon, we're told, was righteous and devout. He was looking forward to the consolation of Israel. He was waiting expectantly for the coming of the Messiah, which was promised in the Old Testament in passages like the one we heard from Malachi. The Holy Spirit opened Simeon's eyes to recognizing Jesus, the one long promised. He saw Jesus and was at peace.

What strikes me is that the mere sight of the baby Jesus was enough for Simeon. If it was me, if I had been in that position, I'm sure my prayer would have been, "Oh God, let me just see how this works out. Let me see the baby, the Messiah grow up. I want to see what the Messiah does." But no,

Simeon had seen enough. It was enough for Simeon to know that the promise had been fulfilled. Now he can go in peace.

What is enough for us? How much of God do we need to see and experience before we find peace? What counts for us as fulfillment? What would we have to do to find the fulfillment that Simeon found? How would we recognize that?

Before I close, I should share a particular reason why this passage is special for me, that my father died prematurely and actually I've now reached the age at which my father died, which is a poignant phase of life. He was the rector of a large and lively church and at his funeral, we had this reading read. So the words, "Now, Lord, let your servant depart in peace," carry a particular resonance for me. They speak to me a fulfillment, which is not the same as completeness. My father didn't live to see the things that other people see, but yet I feel his life was fulfilled. We're called to pray for enough, not everything.

So we learn three things about Simeon in his one and only appearance in scripture. The Spirit was at work in him, he identified Jesus as the light, and he leaves us with the challenge of finding the fulfillment and peace that only God can bring. Amen.