

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

Today is 42 days after Christmas. I know that not because I'm keeping count, but because Friday was the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, or Candlemas as we know it in England, and that's always 40 days after Christmas, so I've done the math. I know it's 42. We're celebrating it today. We've moved the feast to today, because I think it's an important feast day to remember and celebrating this Feast of the Presentation of Jesus is a way of marking the transition from Christmas to Easter, and it allows us to think about the character of Simeon, who's at center stage in our Gospel reading. This is the only time in the Bible that he appears, but he makes quite an impact.

But before saying something about Simeon, I should mention that this story evokes powerful memories and emotions for me for a couple of reasons. The first is that Candlemas was always the best service of the year in my college in Oxford. We used to start the service in the dark and then a light, candlelight, would be passed down the rows whilst we sang my favorite hymn, which I'm pleased to say we're singing later, "Lead, Kindly Light," which was written by a college alum, Cardinal Newman. So this passage for me brings back happy memories of my halcyon days, but I won't be any more nostalgic. I'll move on, because I could go on for hours, but I won't. I'll say something instead about Simeon.

Did you notice that when Simeon appears in this reading, there are three references to the Holy Spirit? We're told that the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon, that the Spirit revealed to Simeon that he'd seen the Messiah, and the Spirit guided Simeon to the temple. Three references to the Holy Spirit in just three verses. And look at what happens in the temple after Simeon is guided there. He takes a baby in his arms and prays. Nothing particularly dramatic or spectacular about that. The temple would have been full of people. Lots of people would have seen this couple in the corner praying with a baby and an old man. None of them would have believed that here we are, 2,000 years later, still talking about that incident. The Spirit was working there, quietly and powerfully, as Simeon took the Baby Jesus in his arms. This is not uncommon, in my experience. God's

Spirit can move amongst us powerfully and without a fuss. There doesn't always need to be drama.

Which leads me to mention the prayers that we offer in the chapel each week, on to my right, during when we're receiving Communion. This is something that both Rebecca and I love to do. We keep it simple. We ask the Holy Spirit to join us and work in whatever situation is presented to us by whoever comes forward for a prayer. It's not dramatic, but I hope that might be what we might call the Simeon effect going on. We've heard that the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon, and that's my prayer for what we do in the chapel, that the Holy Spirit will come and rest on us as we pray together.

Let's move on to what Simeon said. He called the baby Jesus he was holding in his arms a light, the revelation to the Gentiles, or to the nations as it says in other translations. Of course, he's not alone in naming Jesus as the light. John's Gospel begins with John saying that Jesus is the light of all people, and of course, Jesus himself names himself as the light. He says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." We all know what it's like to walk in darkness, when we stumble into a room and we can't find the light switch, and we're bumbling around hitting things, and everything feels very confusing, and we can't find a way out. It's only when the lights go on that everything becomes clear and we can see.

Now, the coming of Jesus is God's making himself known to light up the world and show us the way, and that's what we celebrate in Epiphany, which is a word which means to make manifest, or to reveal. We celebrate in this season the coming of the light. God in Christ came as the light of the world, as one of us, or as the writer to the Hebrews puts it in our reading, "like us in every respect." He comes to reveal himself to the world. The revelation of God is for all people, which is why at the beginning of Epiphany, we remember the wise men, those seekers who came to the manger who were Gentiles. Their presence at the manger represents the fact that God came in Christ for the whole world, not just the people of Israel. Light reveals, and light 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."

We see here how Simeon bridges the gap between Christmas and Easter. Whilst holding the baby Jesus, he points forward to the bitterness of the cross. He acknowledges that the coming of Jesus both exposes the sin that lurks in the darkness and also deals with it in his death. I had a bit of an insight into this this week on the golf range. I had my first ever golf lesson. In the darkness of my mind, my golf swing was a thing of great fluidity and beauty, but when exposed to the light of the coach's TV camera, and I was put up on the screen, it was there to be seen in its full horror, and the reason I can't hit a golf ball straight became perfectly clear.

I was on one half of the screen. Tiger Woods was on the other half of the screen. The faults of my swing were fully exposed, but in the confidence of being with my coach, I felt, "Well, he, hopefully, will be able to deal with it, especially given how much I'm paying him to do that." When we come into the light of Christ, we dare to examine the sin that lurks inside us that we do such a good job of covering up. We do that because we can do it in the company of Jesus Christ, who has done on the cross all that needs for us to be relieved of that burden of sin.

Lastly, I want to mention Simeon's great sense of fulfillment. "Master, 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, like the passage that we heard from Malachi. The Holy Spirit opened Simeon's eyes to recognizing Jesus, to see in the baby he held in his arms the one long promised. He saw the baby Jesus and was at peace.

What strikes me is that the mere sight of the baby was enough for Simeon. If it was me, I'm sure my prayer would have been, "God, I'm so pleased to have held the baby. Please let me see him grow up. I want to see what the Messiah will do. I want to see what he'll teach. Just grant me enough years to see a bit more." But no. He's happy with what he's seen. He doesn't need to see everything. He's seen enough, or as Newman says in the hymn we'll sing, "The distant

scene I do not wish to see. One step enough for me." Simeon has seen enough. Enough to know that God's promise to him has 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 can find the peace that Simeon found? What counts as fulfillment for us? What do we need to do, see, or own before we can find fulfillment, the fulfillment Simeon found?

There's one more reason why this passage is so significant for me, and that is that my father died young when we was still the rector of a large and lively parish, and we chose this reading, the Dimittis as it's known, for his funeral service. So these words, "Now let your servant go in peace," have a particular resonance with me. The prayer Simeon prayed is the prayer we chose for my father's funeral. So we've seen three things about Simeon. The Spirit was at work in him, he identified Jesus as the light, and the challenge Simeon leaves us with is finding that peace and sense of fulfillment which he found and only God can bring.

Amen.