

A Sermon for the 4th Sunday after Epiphany

February 1, 2026



The Presentation of our Lord

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[Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – The Episcopal Church](#)

The Presentation – February 1, 2026 by Troy Dunn

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Today we celebrate the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. What exactly is this “presentation” ritual, you may ask? Well, let me tell you what it is not. The presentation is often confused with Jesus’s circumcision. This presentation ritual is not the circumcision of Jesus. That ritual is done eight days after the birth of a newborn son, in keeping with the law of the Covenant. The Presentation ritual is done forty days after the birth of a recently born child. This is why we count forty days after the celebration of Christmas, the birth of Jesus, to the celebration of the Presentation, today (counting from Christmas Day forty days is actually tomorrow). The mother, who was ritually unclean after birthing a son, had to wait forty days until her purification was complete, after which the parents then presented their son to be consecrated to the Lord in a special way. To make the purification complete the mother had to offer a lamb as well as a pigeon or turtledove. But if the parents could not afford a lamb then 2 pigeons or 2 turtledoves would suffice. Since they offered two doves this demonstrates the material poverty of the family. The first son belonged to God so the child’s parents had to buy back (redeem) their child by paying five shekels to the priest.

To better understand this concept let’s take a short trip back to the Old Testament for a few minutes. If we go back to the O.T. book of Exodus we learn that the Israelites were spared during the tenth plague because they followed God’s dictates. As a result, God declared that all Jewish firstborn sons and animals belonged to Him. Those sons, having been saved by God’s hand, were now obligated to be His full-time servants and priests. Several years after the Israelite’s departure from Egypt, those firstborn sons became the priesthood of the Jewish nation. However, as God revealed more of His plan for His people, He designated an entire tribe of Israel for His holy purpose, the sons of Levi (the Levitical priesthood). So what becomes of all the previously appointed firstborn sons? God specifies that the firstborn sons be

redeemed (bought back) for service other than the priesthood. Since the days of Moses the custom of “pidyon ha’Ben” has been an important event in the biblical and Jewish life cycle. And we later learn in Numbers that it is recorded that the timing of “pidyon ha’Ben” is one month after a boy’s birth. This would require the father to take his infant son into the Tabernacle or Temple, where he would offer an official remittance of money for the baby boy’s redemption. The exact amount is stated as five shekels of silver. Joseph and Mary brought the newborn baby to the Temple to fulfill their obligations. This obligation was twofold: First, to ceremonially cleanse the mother and make the proper sacrifice. The family of Yeshua was not wealthy and therefore presented the less expensive offering of two pigeons. The second part of the obligation was to redeem the firstborn son through the “pidyon ha’Ben” ritual. The child Yeshua was not exempt from this redemption.

The two important acts we take away from today’s readings include 1) the purification of Mary, and 2) the redemption of baby Jesus. Interestingly, nowhere in Mosaic Law does it state that the purification must be done in the Temple. This suggests that the Holy Family was being extra devout by going to the Temple for this special day. Even more interestingly, Luke mentions that the two pigeons were bought and given, but he leaves out one important part – he makes no mention of the 5 shekels being paid. Why does he leave out the description of this redemption taking place? In this case, the parents do not “buy back” their child. Luke purposely leaves out the payment of 5 shekels to drive home the point the infant Jesus belongs to his heavenly Father. Instead of being redeemed this child was personally handed over to God in the Temple, given over completely to God. The presentation is a deeply symbolic moment pointing to Jesus’s divine identity, and to Mary and Joseph’s perfect cooperation with his divine mission.

We’ve examined the historical context, but what about the prophetic context? What Malachi foretells in the first reading is now being fulfilled in Jesus as we now read in Luke’s account. God’s

promised Messiah had finally come to redeem and save God's people. Two people are mentioned: Simeon and the prophetess Anna. Here we have Simeon, a man with impeccable Jewish credentials. He is a student of Israel's history and Israel's place in the saving work of God. He was promised that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Mary and Joseph have brought Jesus to the Temple, which is the institution that lies at the heart of all it means to be a child of God, and their intention is to fulfill the law. The scene is set – Simeon, an independent and credible witness; Mary and Joseph, observant Jews; The ritual, precisely what observant Jews would do. Then, overwhelmed with joy with Jesus in his arms, Simeon who's been watching and waiting for the Lord's Messiah prophesies how Jesus will fulfill this long-help hope. He is, first and foremost, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to the people of Israel. This light for revelation is cause for the naming of this feast as Candlemas. His preaching will bring with it both judgement (the falling)(unbelief) and salvation (the rising)(belief) of many in Israel. Fun fact - Simeon's canticle of praise is often referred to as the Nunc Dimitis. To Gentiles who wonder if they belong – Simeon's words are reassuring. His words affirm the Gentiles' struggles to belong in the prophetic heritage of Judaism and they explain the limited number of converts. Gentiles simply didn't know if or how they belonged. It anchors the Gentile experience in the specifics of the Biblical story of salvation history. That consolation (or rising) of Israel is tied to the coming and establishing of the Kingdom of God. It is also in keeping with the common theme in Luke/Acts of the worldwide scope of the gospel for both Jew and Gentile. And Luke makes sure to mention the presence of the Holy Spirit even at this point in Jesus's life. It was that same Spirit that came upon Zechariah regarding John the Baptist. This Holy Spirit guided Simeon that day to the right place and the right time. Then there's Anna, who was widowed at some point, spending the rest of her years in service to the Temple and devotion to prayer. She was evidently married for 7

years. We are not exactly sure if she was 84 at this point or if she'd been widowed for 84 years, but she also prophesies - that the people of Jerusalem's redemption is at hand. The redemption of Jerusalem is the redemption of all the people of Israel. Simeon and Anna are faithful keepers of the law and they symbolize the embrace of the Lord of his people who await the Messiah. The priests and scribes of the day do not see it; they don't get it. But simple faith-filled people like Simeon and Anna with hearts open to the Spirit's promptings are who get it!

Can you imagine knowing that in your lifetime you were promised to see the Messiah for yourself? Every day you'd wonder, is this the day? Every child you saw presented, is this the one? Simeon entered the Temple that day, like it has countless times before throughout his lifetime to once again do his ordained duty, but at this particular presentation he knew! This was the day! This was the child! Finally, He's here! He has waited not 9 months, but a lifetime. You can hear the relief in his words when he speaks to Mary and Joseph. Jesus, the Messiah, the promised bearer of peace, light, and salvation for all people has come; deliverance is here! As we heard in our story at the presentation ritual – Jesus is not redeemed. He redeems us! He buys us back and pays the price for our sins. Now I've seen him as promised. Now I can go and die. His parents must have been confused and amazed. How'd he know, they must have thought. Simeon continues to prophesy. He now sees Mary's own forthcoming pain and suffering; how her own heart itself will be pierced as with a sword. After all of this, as mind boggling as it was for them, we are told that they upon their return home, a distance of about 5 miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, Jesus grew in strength and wisdom and favor. We learn in our reading from Hebrews that Jesus does what is expected as a human child of flesh and blood. He does not give help to angels; rather, to the descendants of Abraham, a reference to Jewish believers to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. By being like his brothers in all things Jesus became their high priest to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Now that we've examined the history, prophecy, rules, laws, rituals, and payments – what does it all mean?

To some Jesus was not the deliverer they thought he should have been. – to free them from Roman oppression, a mercenary, to be free from the burden of taxes and social inequalities. Yet, others saw a life rooted in self-emptying, love, build on mercy and forgiveness, where the poor are blessed and the rich are sent away empty (where have we heard that before?). Jesus is a consolation and his death was not a humiliation, but the ultimate expression of love. He was that 5 shekels offered to buy us back. He brought light to dark places and alleviated suffering, one place, one person at a time. Jesus modelled for all what it meant to be truly human so that by imitating him in love and service, the peace and salvation he came to bring to the world would continue. In our current world situation, as dark as it sometimes seems, we have a choice – we can give into fear and hate, cynicism and despair, or we can follow the way of Jesus bringing light to dark places and alleviate suffering one place, one person at a time. A current example that has been very inspiring to thousands of people across the nation right now is the small group of Buddhist monks on a Walk for Peace from the Huong Dao Vipassana Bhavana Center in Fort Worth, Texas to Washington DC. They started their walk in the late fall and they plan to arrive in DC by mid-February. They mindfully walk solely for peace, which people are so hungry for right now. In their simple act of taking each step and each breath mindfully, smiling, greeting those lined along streets to see them pass or to receive a peace bracelet, give or receive a flower or hear some kind loving words, offering hope with no agenda, no underlying motives, many hearts have been moved and changed. People have broken down in tears just by seeing them walking by. It is evident that something is so desperately needed right now. Peace starts with us, in each individual heart. Our Jesus is the Prince of Peace. In small acts of love and care for each other and for creation, we can extend his peace,

light, and salvation. We have a choice. Just like the monks have demonstrated; we always have a choice.

Amen!