



Sermon

The Presentation of Our Lord, February 2, 2025

Luke 2:22-40

The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey

Christ Church Detroit

I was asking our children in Sunday School what it means to bless something, or to bless someone. Why would it be, we were talking about, that we would bless candles today? Why would we do that and what does it mean? I asked them, “What does it mean to bless something or bless someone anyway?” And one of them said, “I think it means that God is with them. I think to bless something means to say, ‘God is there.’ I think to bless someone is to say that God is with you.”

What a blessing it is to hear this in the words of our kids, and what a blessing it is to hear in our Gospel today, that Simeon and Anna are blessing Mary and Joseph and their infant, who they just met. How could it be that Simeon and Anna, upon meeting and greeting this forty-day-old baby, can say “God is with you. Here is God”? Simeon says, in words that are now famous and frequently prayed and sung, especially in our services of Evening Prayer and Evensong, “My eyes have seen salvation, which you, God, have prepared for all people. My eyes now have seen the light for Gentiles and for Israel. My eyes have seen a light for all people. Here,” Simeon says, “here is God.”<sup>1</sup>

Simeon is devout and practicing and praying in the temple very frequently; Anna, a prophet, was said to be fasting and praying day and night without ceasing.<sup>2</sup> In their prayers and in their practice, in their persistence and perseverance, they had been looking and looking for the light to come into the world—likely not anticipating that this light would come in a baby this day.

Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus were in the temple that day according to the Law of Moses as it is written in Leviticus, chapter 12, about practices and customs around childbirth and what happens afterwards, childbirth being recognized as a most holy and extraordinary experience—one that of course draws attention to the home and the family growing, to the woman’s own body as it changes and heals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:30-32, with paraphrase

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:25,37b

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 12, entire chapter. For interpretive guidance from Rabbi Sandy Sasso, see “Commentary on Luke 2:22-40” by Holly Hearon, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), December 28, 2008

And so, there was then and there is in some forms now, a practice that the woman and the new family would go back to the temple once physically healed and ready to head out into public again, with the diaper bag and the bottles, etc. (You know, it takes two hours to get out of the house, with the baby's naps and diaper changes ... it's a whole ordeal.)

Finally, they make it out of the house, and it is their first appearance back in the temple since Jesus' birth, the Law and customs specifying that eight days after a baby boy's birth, he would be circumcised, and thirty-three days after that, the mother and the family would come to the temple for her purification and their recognition as a new family, their "presentation" and a meet-and-greet of the child<sup>4</sup>.

It is to be noted—it's not spelled out here, but members of Luke's community and Luke himself note—that they bring along with them a sacrifice of two turtledoves, or a couple of young pigeons. Of course, we're unfamiliar with those practices now, but looking at Leviticus, this is the option for those who do not have the means to bring the proper sacrifice, which would be a lamb. So, with their arriving with two doves, that's signaling that this is not a family of means: this is a family living closer to the margins, this is a poor family, this is a migrant family, and thus, is a family that would be overlooked very easily<sup>5</sup>.

What is a blessing it is, then—how powerful it is, then—that instead of overlooking or ostracizing, these elders, Simeon and Anna, bear upon them their most lavish attention. They see the light in the infant Jesus and mirror it back, because the light that they see, they know, is a light for all people: native and immigrant, poor and wealthy, young and old, Jew and Gentile. This is a light with no boundary and no limit. This is a light for all people.

James Baldwin, in one of his essays in a book called *Nothing Personal*, writes that "one discovers the light in darkness, that is what the darkness is for; but everything in our lives depends on how we bear the light."<sup>6</sup> Simeon and Anna have been living in a darkness of sorts as they have been praying and hoping and looking for the light that would be coming. And, they may have given up hope that they would see it. And when they do, they cannot keep their mouths shut; they name it and proclaim it, because—Simeon's and Baldwin's words could be the same, that—"everything in our lives depends on how we bear the light."

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, "Commentary on Luke 2:22-40" by Shively Smith, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), December 31, 2017: "Luke makes clear *where* in Jewish society Jesus' observant family exists. It is among the poor. The two turtledoves Jesus' family presents are the sacrifices designated for the poor, according to Levitical code. It is easy to miss the significance of this brief detail. Many liberation readings of the gospel of Luke, notice Jesus' affinity and attentiveness to the needs of the poor... The location and experiences of the poor, is the experience of Jesus from his infancy."

<sup>6</sup> p. 59, see

<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/1edfde89-769c-4e3d-97a9-ef0394cbd1a4/content>

Because this is of such extraordinary importance, the Feast of the Presentation has become known as Candlemas—the service of the candles—because everything in our lives depends on how we bear the light. Thus, today, we will bless any and every candle that our children have most excitedly lit. In our Godly Play story sessions, the first thing that we do is light candles, and it is the most competitive experience, because everyone wants to be the one to light the candles, and then everyone wants to be the one to extinguish the candles. So, their delight in lighting all of the candles today was extraordinary to see, because everything in our lives depends on how we bear the light.

Baldwin continued that “it is necessary, while in darkness, to know that there is a light somewhere, to know that in oneself, waiting to be found, there is a light.”<sup>7</sup> He also writes that “the longer I live, the more deeply I learn that love—whether we call it friendship or family or romance—is the work of mirroring each other’s light.” Love is the work of mirroring each other’s light. Simeon and Anna recognize this as their calling, their moment, their need to mirror the light that they saw; to mirror this light that they knew was not theirs alone, not the family’s alone, not their community’s alone, but it was and is for all people. This light would not be kept under a bushel; this light would not be locked away in a closet; this light would not and will never be extinguished. Everything in our lives and in our faith depends on how we bear the light.

This bearing of the light, this mirroring of each other’s light, Baldwin calls “gentle work. Steadfast work. Life-saving work in those moments when shame and sorrow occlude our own light from view, but there is still a clear-eyed loving person to beam it back. In our best moments,” he writes, “we are that person for one another.” Now, it is not easy: it is often joyful, it is often delightful, it is also sometimes risky and dangerous, and there is sacrifice and discipline and inconvenience involved in bearing and mirroring the light, living this faith. Baldwin was writing in one of those times; Simeon and Anna and Mary and Joseph and Jesus were living in one of those times; we are living in one of those times.

Baldwin notes, finally, that “what the light” around us and within us “reveals” can be “danger”—what it reveals may be danger, “and what it demands is faith.” Faith is the demand upon all of us. We need all the light that we can get, in any and every way. We need not fear the darkness, as fearful as it is, because by faith we know that is when and where we see the light. Everything depends on how we share and bear that light.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.