

Sermon – Luke 2:22-40
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Grace Lutheran Church
Presentation of Our Lord – Year A
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“It’s All in the Presentation”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Taking in a game in all 30 Major League Baseball stadiums. Traveling to Svalbard to see the Northern Lights. Making the trip to New Zealand to see its natural beauty and to explore the locations where *The Lord of the Rings* was filmed. What do these have in common? They’re all items on my bucket list; things I’d love to do before I die. The three things I just named have been on my list for a while. And while I know that I’m still a whippersnapper, aging has started to shift the sort of items I add to the list. These days I find myself longing to be around to see my children launched into careers and relationships or whatever else God has in store for them. I pray I will see the day when civility and even good-old-fashioned honesty return to our national discourse. And I yearn desperately for a time when Grace will once again have an associate pastor. It’s been so long! Oh, it’s only been two weeks? I joke, of course. To be honest, this is all incredibly energizing. But enough about me. What about you? What’s on your bucket list? I imagine there’s a list of adventures for some of you, while others yearn for simple things. Some here today are no doubt yearning simply, desperately, for healing, hope, wholeness.
2. The song sung at the center of today’s gospel reading bursts forth from Simeon, a man with a bucket list one item long. The Spirit had promised Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. But Simeon is just one of several figures before us in this incredibly rich passage

in Luke's gospel. Today is the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, or Candlemas, and the chaotic scene at the Temple is filled with people of hope. Young parents at the start of a new journey in life. Simeon, with a bucket list and a song. Anna, at the end of life's journey, an emptiness waiting to be filled. And the young child, Jesus, forty-days old, at the center of it all.

3. Luke begins with Mary and Joseph arriving at the Temple. Mary needs to be purified according to the Law, and it's time to present Jesus to the Lord. Who knows what the young couple was feeling, other than perhaps shame that they couldn't afford the money for the requisite sacrifice? They could only afford to sacrifice two turtledoves, which was probably a relief to all of those pipers piping and drummers drumming, but I digress. Following the purification, they present Jesus. Unlike most Jewish parents at the time, they do not redeem him. More on that later, though, for no sooner had they come forward than some random man comes over and scoops their baby into his arms. Tradition, not Luke, tells us that Simeon is old, but both affirm the same thing. He has been waiting for one thing and one thing only, to behold the Lord's Messiah, the One who would be a light to the Gentiles and a glory to Israel, the One who would bring salvation.

4. Although Simeon gets the song, Luke reveals more, perhaps, by making mention of Anna, even though her words are lost to history. Her voice is in her name. For who is Anna but one named for Hannah, the childless wife of Elkanah from centuries before? Remember. In her sorrow she went to the Temple to pray for a child, promising that if God gave her a son, she would give the son back to God. Eli, the priest, overhears her and assumes she is drunk. Quite the contrary, Hannah responds. She is not filling herself with drink; she is emptying herself before the Lord. Who is born to Hannah? Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, who is returned to the Temple and the service of the Lord. Through him God would identify David as king.

5. Anna, a reminder of empty Hannah in the Temple, see the baby Jesus and rejoices. After a lifetime of fasting and prayer she sees the beginning of the world's redemption. Through her presence we glean insight into what God is doing. Earlier I mentioned that Joseph and Mary did not redeem Jesus. According to the Law, every firstborn son had to be presented to the Lord as one who belonged to God. God, however, did not actually need a bunch of kids toddling about the Temple, so parents were allowed to buy back their sons. All for the low price of five shekels each. Luke makes no mention of Jesus' parents doing this because they didn't. No, they don't leave him there, but they do leave him in God's service. Hannah's story echoes, reminding us of another son given to God.

6. But Mary and Joseph are not only giving a child to God's service, for Jesus is not simply a child. Other echoes reverberate. The prophet Malachi, from whom we heard earlier, spoke of a day when the Lord would return suddenly to the Temple and the priests would be able to make righteous sacrifices once more. This is bundled up in the presentation of Jesus, the bundle in Simeon's arms. He is the Son returned to the Temple unredeemed for he is the One who will redeem the people. He can redeem us because he is himself the Lord returning to his Temple. The sacrifice is righteous because he himself is the gift offered. This will not come to fulfillment for 30 more years, but the story of salvation is wrapped up in that child held by Simeon on the day of Presentation. Jesus, God's Son and the King of David's line, has returned to the Temple to redeem the world through the offering of his own life back to God.

7. Simeon and Anna allow us a point of entry into the story that unfolded that day. We see that day, and this day, through their eyes.. For we, too, live in a world desperate to see the salvation of our God. We, too, worry and wonder about how long we will have to wait for this falling-apart world to be put back together. We, too, seem to have little but our own emptiness to bring

before the Lord. But as my friend, Rabbi Yehiel Poupko, writes about the mother of Samuel, Hannah “comes to this meeting with her God on the ground of her personal barrenness.” Let that be our starting point, too. We need not bring our fullness before God in prayer; let our hope be in our emptiness, for in our emptiness there is room for God to work. With Anna watch and pray. Keep the laser focus of Simeon, living a life on the lookout for one thing and one thing only – the light of God that redeems Israel and reveals God to the Gentiles. This Light is Jesus, the Christ who comes to the Temple, the child who will redeem all children of God, the One who perfectly offered his living and his dying that we would be saved. On this Candlemas, we pray not so much for our candles as we do for ourselves. We pray out of emptiness, our own and the world’s, that Christ would fill all in all. We pray that our lives would shine forth with hope and light the way to justice and truth. We pray that the Light of Christ would break forth like the dawn.

8. As answer to that prayer, turn your eyes with Anna and Simeon and see God, presented here for you in the body and blood of Christ, given and shed to redeem you from sin and death, filling your emptiness with light and life. And whatever is on your list, remember that you’ve already kicked the bucket. In baptism, you are already alive on the other side of death’s power. So take and eat. Go and shine brightly. Your eyes have seen God’s salvation. Sing with joy at hope fulfilled. Depart in peace and work for that peace to break forth in the world. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.