**Prepared to Live and Die Well**

Based on [Luke 2:22-40](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk2.22-40)

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The First Sunday after Christmas

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The gospel for the First Sunday after Christmas takes place forty days after Jesus was born. **This is in honor of Mary, Joseph, and the infant Christ who travelled to Jerusalem, to the temple, forty days after Jesus was born.** There are two reasons they did so. First, was for the purification of Mary. The second is for the presentation of Jesus.

According to Scripture, an Israelite woman who had given birth to a son was unclean. **So, after 40 days she had to go to the Jerusalem Temple to be purified in the prescribed way.** As the head of the house Joseph had to see to it that this purification of his wife was duly carried out. He provided the necessary sacrifices for her: namely, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. This was the purification of Mary, and the reason for 40 days.

The other event that drew them to the Temple is the presentation of Jesus. The Scriptures taught that all firstborn Israelite males are holy to the Lord. They belong to him directly, not through parents, and must be “redeemed”, that is, purchased back from the Lord. The price for this was five sheckels. This Presentation of Jesus was the other occasion, along with the Purification of Mary, that brought the holy family to Jerusalem’s temple forty days after Jesus’ birth.

Today’s gospel tells of righteous people of God. It shows us that Jesus’ family were righteous people. **Not only righteous in the sense that they had saving faith--which is the paramount kind of righteousness—but also that they were faithful observers of God’s Law.** They got Jesus’ circumcised on the eighth day according to the Law. Then after forty days, they observed the purification according to the Law, and Presented and redeemed Jesus at the temple according to the Law. This type of righteous might be analogous to someone today who regularly attends church, lives humbly, and faithfully avails themselves of the means of grace.

While at the Temple, the holy family encounters two other righteous people, Simeon and Anna. Again, they were righteous in the sense that their observance of God’s Law showed their faith. **Their faithfulness to God’s law and their hope in the Lord are remarkable.** Just as the nameless woman who anointed Jesus' head with expensive perfume is forever immortalized in the Gospels (Matt. 26:13, Mark 14:8), so too Simeon and Anna--probably unremarkable people in the world's eyes--are seen and remembered by God for their devoutness.

Simeon was a devout man. Probably old, and evidently eager to die. In fact, that’s a particular feature of a faithful Christian. Many older people are waiting for the Lord to take them, because they know their saviour and that heaven is their home. Simeon knew this too, but he was a prophet. **And the Holy Spirit was given him and revealed to him that he was to see the Christ before he died.** The Christ is called “the consolation of Israel”. And Simeon speaks, perhaps sings a song describing the importance of this Christ child. Part of his song is his joy that he can now depart in peace...that is, “die”, because God has fulfilled his promise that he would see his saviour.

Also, a prophetess named Anna or Hannah, was at the temple. **She was a widow, married seven years and then her husband died and the remainder of her life was dedicated to God, with worshipping and fasting at the temple.** And presumably having heard Simeon’s words and his rejoicing, she gave thanks to God, and she began to tell all who had been waiting for the messiah that he had come.

Simeon and Anna are examples of those nameless faithful people of God under the Old Covenant, who were aware enough to realize that they had lived to see the ushering in of the new age**. Generations had passed from Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through David and Solomon, through the exile to Babylon and back again God’s people had waited for a messiah; and none of *them* lived to see the messiah born. But with their own eyes Simeon and Anna saw the messiah and they are prepared to die well.**

The gospel is about Jesus Christ being the saviour of the world. But it also tells of people who live righteous lives because of their faith in the saviour. They love not their own lives unto death, but live and die for the Word of God, because he is their salvation.

We can rest assured to live and to leave this life knowing that our redemption is accomplished. It is accomplished, not by our works done in righteousness--but by a man from Nazareth who—though he was in the form of the unchangeable God--grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God that was first upon him, because of him, now rests upon us.