

Text: Luke 2:22-35. Presentation of our Lord. **February 2, 2014.**

Grace and peace are yours through our perfect Substitute, Jesus. Amen.

Did you know that February 2 is a holiday? And not the one with the rodent and the weather prediction. February 2 in the Christian Church has been celebrated for centuries as the presentation of our Lord. It's the day when Jesus was brought to the temple. It's celebrated on February 2 because that is precisely forty days after Christmas and it was forty days after Jesus' birth that he was presented in the temple. Some people light candles and even celebrate an event I had never heard of called candlemas. It remembers Jesus as the light of the world, something mentioned in the song Simeon sang on this day. Some people gather around a tiny figurine of Jesus, so small you can hold it in your hand, just as Simeon held Jesus in his arms. Those are all interesting facts about February 2, the presentation of our Lord. But this celebration has a deeper meaning. Jesus was presented in the temple as our perfect Substitute. He kept every single one of God's laws perfectly, down to the last detail, so that Jesus' death on the cross would be the sacrifice of a perfect person, in your place. The presentation of Jesus gave us a special song, sung by Simeon, we still sing today, a song that declares some good news, great news, awesome, out of this world news. My eyes have seen your salvation. "My eyes have seen Jesus," is what Simeon was saying. And your eyes have seen Jesus, too. My eyes have seen Jesus, that's where we will focus our celebration of the presentation of our Lord today. My eyes have seen Jesus!

Ok. So, Mary and Joseph, the earthly parents of Jesus, go to the temple to do what the law required. It's in the Old Testament. Leviticus chapter 12 if you want to examine it further. Every child had to be brought to the temple and a special sacrifice of thanks be offered. Every mother had to be purified from the flow of blood that follows childbirth. So Mary and Joseph went. They fulfilled the law's requirements. They presented Jesus. This was more than a ritual in this case. They were presenting him to God as the perfect Substitute for you, the perfect Substitute for me. As your eyes look on Jesus being presented in the temple, see your perfect Substitute, taking your place and living a perfect life, from the very beginning.

There's something else significant. Leviticus 12 said the offering was supposed to be a lamb, unless you were too poor, then you could bring two young pigeons. Mary and Joseph brought the offering of the poor. Yes, this means the wise men had not yet come with their gold and frankincense and myrrh. But it also changed my mind about the life of Mary and Joseph. They were poor! Can you imagine the shame of walking into the temple, with all these people watching and they are bringing the poor people's offering! The snickers and whispers. I think we have this idea that life was easy for Mary and Joseph. God was watching them. Nothing bad was going to happen to Jesus. Yeah, they had to stay with the animals a night or two, but it's a serene, quiet, peaceful picture. Jesus makes no crying according to the hymn. And he probably didn't make any dirty diapers and he slept through the night and Mary and Joseph just gazed longingly into the eyes of Jesus. Come on! They were poor, first time parents, a hundred miles from home. Jesus opened the womb of a virgin. That had to hurt.

And then Simeon comes on the scene. He's really an awesome guy. We only hear good things about him. He was righteous, meaning through faith in Jesus God had declared him right. Don't think about Simeon doing a bunch of righteous things. Think of God doing one big righteous thing for Simeon, giving him faith! Simeon was devout. He was careful and conscientious and pious and godly. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was waiting for Jesus. And Simeon had some special connection to God. God revealed Simeon would not die before his eyes saw Jesus. God moved Simeon to go to the temple that day. And God even allowed Simeon to wrest a baby from the arms of his parents. How does that happen? And God gave Simeon some special words we still sing over and over again today. Everything God tells us about Simeon is good.

But not everything Simeon tells Mary and Joseph about God is good. Simeon tells them, "Jesus is going to bring more pain into your life." A sword will pierce your soul. Mary and Joseph frantically searched for the lost Jesus when he was twelve. Can you imagine losing God, for three days? Mary looked on while Jesus was nailed, bloody, beaten, dying. Mothers, can you imagine standing at the cross while your son dies? That's a sword through the heart. Being the mother of Jesus was not always easy.

And being a follower of Jesus is not always easy as well. Jesus is a sign that will be spoken against. He will cause the rising and falling of many. Jesus not only is the Savior, he's the great offense. Try telling someone, "I believe Jesus is the only way to heaven. Those who don't believe in him are going to hell." That's what Jesus said! There's no good teacher, nice guy, fence sitting with Jesus. Pick a side. Either he's the Savior or he's Satan. Those were the two reactions people had. Savior or Satan.

And don't try to fool anybody with your wishy washy, I like Jesus, but hey, there's other good religions, too idea. Jesus will reveal the thoughts of your heart! Oh! No! The thought of distraction about the Super Bowl commercials, even when I'm here in God's house? The thought of jealousy when I got third in the math meet? The thought of self-righteousness when he's slacking at work? Jesus will reveal all those thoughts and all the nasty things you never said. My eyes have seen Jesus? Maybe, no, not maybe, my sinful self does not want to see that!

Look at Jesus again. He's presented as your perfect Substitute. Jesus never had those sinful thoughts, not as a baby, not ever. Jesus was presented here on this day, in this temple to take your place. His perfect thoughts are all God can see! Jesus is all you can see. Look at what Simeon said, "My eyes have seen your salvation." The name Jesus means Savior. Jesus is your salvation. But wait, my eyes have never seen Jesus like Simeon did! I've never held Jesus in my arms like Simeon did. Wait. Stop and think. Your eyes have seen Jesus' blood poured right down your throat and become part of you. That same blood that purifies you from every sin is part of you! You have held Jesus in your hand, his true body, right there. I know it just looks like stale bread. But that is Jesus' body! It's the real thing! Your eyes have seen Jesus! Your hands have held Jesus! Your mouth has tasted Jesus! Do you see why we sing this song of Simeon after the Lord's Supper? My eyes have seen your salvation.

Now I can go in peace. I can go in peace back to work and not have that self-righteous thought. I can go back to school and thank God for my gifts to finish third and thank God for the gifts others are using faithfully to finish first. I can go with God's peace that my sins are forgiven. And ultimately, I can go in peace to heaven.

That's what Simeon was really thinking about when he sang. Simeon was not just expressing some wish that God would let him depart in peace. Simeon was stating a fact! "You are dismissing your servant in peace. This is in perfect keeping with the words you spoke to me." Simeon, whether he was old or young we don't really know, Simeon was looking forward to leaving this earth. Simeon was looking forward to dying. Simeon wanted to taste death so he would be set free! All the words Simeon uses, depart, servant, Lord, are the words for a slave being released from bondage. That's how Simeon pictured life, as slavery to the sins of this earth and slavery to death. But when this life ends, then I am set free! No more sickness, no more suffering, no more sadness, no more poverty! Set free! Set free! Set free! Set free because my eyes have seen Jesus.

This Jesus, this salvation is prepared for all people, face to face, up close, right in front of you, Jesus is here talking to you. God prepared this special salvation just for you! This salvation, this Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles. Remember light is one of the themes of this Epiphany season and one of the ways people celebrate the presentation of our Lord. Gentiles and Israel are used here in more of a spiritual sense than a national sense. Just as Simeon wasn't looking for a national, political Savior, he wasn't talking about people in national or political terms. Gentiles stand for unbelievers. To unbelievers, Jesus is the light that reveals God's salvation for the first time. But for believers, for Israel, this salvation is a chance to give God glory. Your eyes have seen Jesus. The rest of your life is just details. The whole purpose of your life is to give glory to God!

This won't always be easy. Many people will not appreciate how clearly your eyes have seen Jesus as the one and only salvation God has given us. That's ok. People didn't appreciate it when Jesus said it either. But don't you see? God will present you, perfect, to Jesus in heaven. There you will see your salvation fulfilled. You will see Jesus without glasses. You will see Jesus face to face! You will see Jesus as you have never seen him before, holy and pure and perfect. Your eyes have seen Jesus. Your eyes will see Jesus. Amen.