

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD – 2 FEBRUARY 2025



COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
we humbly implore your majesty
that, just as your Only Begotten Son
was presented on this day in the Temple
in the substance of our flesh,
so, by your grace,
we may be presented to you with minds made pure.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

This is one of a small group of feasts called 'Feasts of the Lord' which take precedence over a Sunday. It is a throwback to the Christmas season – the Nativity of the Lord was forty days ago. According to the Jewish Law (Lev 12:1-8), on the fortieth day after the birth of a boy, the mother presented herself and her son at the Temple to offer a sacrifice; this served as a presentation of the son and a purification of the mother after childbirth. This second aspect meant that for some centuries the feast focussed on the Virgin Mary. Since the revised calendar of 1969, it has been called the Presentation of the Lord. The day has also been called 'Candlemas' because the liturgy includes the blessing of candles and a procession with lighted candles, a reference to the Christmas theme of light. The feast celebrates the revelation of Christ to Simeon and Anna whom Jesus' family met in the Temple.

A reading from the prophet Malachi 3:1–4

The Lord God says this: Look, I am going to send my messenger to prepare a way before me. And the Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter his temple; and the angel of the covenant whom you are longing for, yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. Who will be able to resist the day of his coming? Who will remain standing when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire and the fuller's alkali. He will take his seat as refiner and purifier; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and then they will make the offering to the Lord as it should be made. The offering of Judah and Jerusalem will then be welcomed by the Lord as in former days, as in the years of old.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 23:7–10

R. Who is this king of glory? It is the Lord!

O gates, lift up your heads;
grow higher, ancient doors.
Let him enter, the king of glory! **R.**

Who is the king of glory?
The Lord, the mighty, the valiant,
the Lord, the valiant in war. **R.**

O gates, lift high your heads;
grow higher, ancient doors.
Let him enter, the king of glory! **R.**

Who is he, the king of glory?
He, the Lord of armies,
he is the king of glory. **R.**

First Reading

Malachi means 'my messenger'. It is a short anonymous prophesy of the 5th century BC that calls for God to purify the people. A messenger will prepare the way of the Lord; this opening sentence is an allusion to John the Baptist. Then the Lord will enter the Temple suddenly. The liturgy applies this text to Jesus the Messiah who today appears in the Temple. Malachi looks forward to a new beginning, a prophesy ultimately to be fulfilled in Christ. The messiah will purify and refine, to use Malachi's metallurgic imagery.

This reading poses a great challenge. Its meaning is not transparent and the phrases are obscure for both the reader and the assembly: "angel of the covenant", "the day of his coming", "refiner's fire", "fuller's alkali", "sons of Levi", "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem". This is all the more reason for the reader to prepare the passage carefully and deliver it well. There is a drama and energy which the reader can render with vigour.

The key message that needs to be communicated is that the Lord is to come unexpectedly to his Temple. The gospel will take up this theme, paradoxically in fact, for the Lord comes not in power and might but in poverty and weakness.

Responsorial Psalm

The response is unusual – it is in the form of a question and answer (a rhetorical feature of the psalm).

The first and third stanzas are virtually identical. They each conclude, "Let him enter, the king of glory!" and each is followed by the dramatic question, "Who is the king of glory?" The answer is majestic: "The Lord, the mighty, the valiant".

This psalm needs to be sung or proclaimed with strength, energy and a broad solemnity. As the response triumphantly affirms, "It is the Lord!"

The entry of the Lord to the Temple is obviously the connection to Malachi and the feast.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews **2:14–18**

Since all the children share the same blood and flesh, Jesus too shared equally in it, so that by his death he could take away all the power of the devil, who had power over death, and set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. For it was not the angels that he took to himself; he took to himself descent from Abraham.

It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins. That is, because he has himself been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted.

A reading from the holy Gospel **according to Luke** **2:22–40**

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord - observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord - and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and he blessed God; and he said:

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.'

[As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected - and a sword will pierce your own soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in

Second Reading

Like the text from Malachi, this passage from the letter to the Hebrews is neither easy for readers to proclaim nor for the assembly to understand. It begins with a long and difficult sentence.

The argument goes like this. Jesus has become a human being and so shares human flesh and blood and even human temptation. Consequently, his triumph over the power of death/evil (on the cross) is a victory for the whole human race. As a compassionate high priest (at the altar of the cross) he is able to atone for human sin. If the text can be presented clearly, it does contain a message of consolation and salvation for all.

The reading makes an important connection between the incarnation and the cross. We will see this recur in the Gospel when the child of forty days is held by Simeon in the Temple.

Gospel

The gospel has a longer and a shorter form. The longer form continues after the prayer of Simeon with his prophecy which makes the connection with the cross of Christ. The reading then introduces the beautiful figure of Anna and it concludes with a fine summary of Jesus growing up. It would be a pity not to use the longer version.

Although they are poor (the two birds are the simplest offering for this sacrifice), Mary and Joseph fulfill all the requirements of the law. Simeon and Anna are also models of religious faith: they are attentive to God's word, humble, trusting and obedient, and filled with longing for God's promises to be realised. This small child in Simeon's arms is the one who will be a light and the glory of the people, one who will grow to maturity and wisdom to become the awaited messiah. But, of course, not the triumphant leader people were expecting, rather a sign rejected, the suffering servant who would die on the cross.

years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

CONCLUDING PRAYER

May almighty God bless us in his kindness
and pour out saving wisdom upon us.

Amen.

May he nourish us always with the teachings of the faith
and make us persevere in holy deeds.

Amen.

May he turn our steps towards himself
and show us the path of charity and peace.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time III, Roman Missal p. 715)

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Malachi 3:1-4

Thus says the Lord God:

'See, I am sending my messenger
to prepare the way before me,
and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.
The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight -
indeed, he is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

'But who can endure the day of his coming,
and who can stand when he appears?
For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap;
he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;
and he will purify the descendants of Levi
and refine them like gold and silver,
until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.
Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem
will be pleasing to the Lord
as in the days of old and as in former years.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Psalm 24.7, 8, 9, 10 (R.10)

R. The Lord of hosts: he is king of glory!

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in. **R.**

Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle. **R.**

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in. **R.**

Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory. **R.**

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 2:10-11, 14-18

It was fitting that God,
for whom and through whom all things exist,
in bringing many children to glory,
should make the source of their salvation
perfect through sufferings.
For the one who sanctifies
and those who are sanctified all have one Father.

For this reason

Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying,
“Here am I, and the children whom God has given me.”
Since the children share flesh and blood,
Jesus himself likewise shared the same things,
so that through death
he might destroy the one who has the power of death,
that is, the devil,
and free those who all their lives were held in slavery
by the fear of death.

For it is clear that Jesus did not come to help angels,
but the descendants of Abraham.
Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters
in every respect,
so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest
in the service of God,
to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.

Because Jesus himself was tested by what he suffered,
he is able to help those who are being tested.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification
according to the law of Moses,
the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord.
As it is written in the law of the Lord,
“Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord,”
and they offered a sacrifice
according to what is stated in the law of the Lord,
“a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon;
this man was righteous and devout,
looking forward to the consolation of Israel,
and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit
that he would not see death
before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple;
and when the parents brought in the child Jesus,
to do for him what was customary under the law,
Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

The child's father and mother
were amazed at what was being said about him.
Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary,
“This child is destined
for the falling and the rising of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be opposed
so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—
and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

There was also a prophet, Anna,
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.
She was of a great age,
having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,
then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.
She never left the temple
but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

At that moment she came, and began to praise God
and to speak about the child
to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When the parents of Jesus had finished everything
required by the law of the Lord,
they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;
and the favour of God was upon him.