

**22** When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), **24** and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

**25** 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. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **27** 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, **28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

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

**33** And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. **34** 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 **35** so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

**36** 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, **37** then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. **38** At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child[d] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

**39** When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. **40** The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him. - *NRSVU*

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We have just heard a story from a time long, long ago, set in a place far, far away. My only hope for this sermon is that I will be able to help this story to come alive for you this morning. I want to bring you into the temple on the day that Jesus was

presented. I want to bring you right into the center of this story by placing you in Mary's shoes. I invite you to journey with me into the temple.

Picture it. Eighty foot solid bronze doors that require 200 men to wrestle them open in the morning. Picture the doors gleaming in the rising sunlight. Picture the men assembling to fulfill their daily obligation. Picture it.

Hear it. The loud creaking echoing throughout the whole city as the grand doors open up, awakening all who hear it as with a rooster's crow. Hear the grunts of men, and the groaning of the mighty doors in response to the application of the strength of these 200 men. Hear it.

Smell it. The strong acrid stinging of burning animal flesh wafting from the altar ahead. Smell this smoke mingling with the smoke of pungent, bittersweet incense, and the sticky stench of human sweat. Smell it all pouring out of those massive, gleaming doors and into your nostrils and all the nostrils of the faithful who have, at long last, reached their pilgrimage destination. Smell it.

Feel it. The brushing of faithful shoulders as you make your way into the massive space. Feel the intense energy of all who have come to worship, sacrifice, and pray. Feel it.

Picture it. You walk into a vast space big enough for 80 to 100 thousand people. Picture the tables scattered about with offerings for sale and the coins glinting in the hands of the money changers. Picture the gilded walls and the glorious, colorful vestments of the priests. Picture it.

Feel it. The terror of livestock who will soon be slaughtered on the altar in sacrifice. Hear it. The squawking of birds, the bleating of sheep and rams, the shouts of salespeople, the prayers of priests, the chanting of psalms, the wailing of mourners, the whimpering of a child. Feel it. The weight of your newborn child in your arms, the fluttering of pigeons' wings as the cage your husband carries them in brushes against your cradling arms. Hear it. The hushed cooing you release into your tiny infant's ear to soothe the whimpering that has been evoked by the noises, and smells all around. Smell it. The stench of animals and hay which clings to you, to your husband, and to your tiny child after spending a week in a barn, after giving birth in a barn.

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Picture it. Another young family passes by with an eight day old baby and a year old lamb and a bird to offer as sacrifice. Hear it. The baby is crying; the lamb is bleating; the bird is squawking. Feel it. The fire that burns in your cheeks as you consider the two birds your husband is carrying, the meager offering that is all that you can afford. Picture it. The glow in your infant's face. Feel it. His steady heart beat beating in sync with your own as you pull him close. Feel it. The deep satisfaction and joy of knowing that this is YOUR baby.

Picture it. A strange old man who is muttering to himself, coming straight towards you. Smell it. The scent of your baby's skin as you pull him even closer in response to a protective impulse. Hear it. The excited gasp of the old man as he comes near to you. Feel it. The tug of your baby out of your arms and the fear that fills the space the infant had occupied. Picture it. The smile that envelops the face of the old man as he rocks your little one and gazes into his eyes. Hear it. The hush that falls over your baby and those gathered around as the man begins to sing. Hear the joy in his trembling voice. Hear the passion. Hear him sing, "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." Feel it. The quickening of your heartbeat, the drying of your mouth, the awe that grips you as you consider what is being said of your tiny boy, as you recall angel visits, and miracles, and promise.

Feel it. The old man's hand pressing on your head. Hear it. The words of blessing that accompany the gentle pressure on your head. Feel it. The comfort and relief that wash over you with this touch and this blessing. Hear it. The sharp words of warning, the prophecy of the pain that will fill the life of your tiny child, and will grip you as well. Feel it. The comfort that drains away; hope giving way to fear once more. Taste it. The salty sweat and tears which drip down your face and into your mouth. Picture it. The gentle man handing your child back to you and walking away with a lighter step and smile still spread wide.

Feel it. The weight of your child in your arms once more, the flutter of pigeons' wings reminding you why you are here. Feel it. Your weary steps carrying you further

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into the temple grounds. Picture it. The old woman, hunched over who comes towards you moving as quickly as she can. Hear it. Her loud shouts of praise. Feel it. The awe and confusion, the pride and wonder that sweep over you once more as she shouts out that your baby, your tiny one, is the salvation that Israel has been waiting for so long. Hear it. The readings from the book of the prophet Isaiah being chanted by priests before the scriptures which promise a deliverer, which promise a savior, which promise consolation for your people. Hear it. The old woman claiming that your son is the fulfillment of these promises. Picture it. You go forward and fulfill the expectations of Jewish law. Smell it. The burning of the birds which you faithfully offer up. Hear it. The priest's chanted prayers. Picture it. The heavy, glittering doors which you now approach to leave. Hear it, the creaking and groaning of the heavy doors closing behind you, and the grunts of faithful men harmonizing with the evening songs of locusts as the moon rises in the sky. Feel it. The exhaustion and gratitude which sweeps over you as you leave the temple grounds and begin your journey home at last.