

2/2/2024 Candlemas

Calendar – Always Feb 2, 40 days after Christmas, after the nativity

Why? Leviticus 12, when a son is born, the mother is considered unclean for seven days for healing. On the eighth day, the day of new beginnings, the child is circumcised. The mother continues to be ceremonially unclean for a total of 40 days at which time she comes to the temple and offers a sacrifice to her ceremonial purification and her thanksgiving.

Two sacrifices are offered, first a pigeon or dove for a sin offering and then a lamb for a whole burnt offering. In cases where the family is too poor, the woman brings two birds in offering instead of a bird and a lamb.

This is the context for today's celebration. Mary comes to the temple with the Holy family to offer the sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic law. Now on the surface, there was nothing exceptionally special about this. There was simply a devout family of small means following through in the obligations of worship. How many other families were at the temple that day doing the same thing? No doubt this was as common as our morning prayers. Day in, Day out, same thing, nothing to see here.

But of course, from the account in Luke, we are privileged to have God's view of what is happening. This is no ordinary woman, this is no ordinary baby. Rather this woman is the Theotokos. This baby is the Messiah, the king of the world, ... no ... the king of the cosmos, of everything there is and of everything there shall ever be. This baby is God incarnate.

So God here is breaking into the everyday lives of His faithful people. The fate of the whole world pivots on the fate of that little baby entrusted to the lowliest of parents. And yet I doubt, even though they have experienced some amazing things surrounding the birth of the child, I doubt that they have the slightest clue about His significance.

When a significant change happens in our lives, we have to be exposed to the change a few times before we realize that things are different. And here again, Mary and Joseph are going to encounter a few individuals in the temple to help them understand that the Baby Jesus is no ordinary child. God is breaking into their lives too. They are just a little slow on the pickup.

Why are we so slow to sense change? Why is change so hard for us? Routine is very powerful, and we can use it to shape our souls in both positive and negative ways. Praying the Daily Offices → positive. Time wasted on the internet → negative. Good habits are difficult to form, and easy to break. Bad habits are easy to form and very difficult to break. When we do the same thing over and over and over again, we become desensitized to what we are doing. This can be good, for we become what we do, we become what we pray. But it can also be bad if we do not expect God to break in.

In the midst of the routine comings and goings of Jews at the temple on that day in first Century Israel, two thousand years ago. God broke in.

And, behold there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, ... which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

What seemed like any other day in the temple, turned out not to be just any other day. God broke in setting everyone buzzing. What was this child to be? God is finally redeeming Israel!

Let us, however, not be fooled. When God does something, when He does break into our everyday, it will defy our expectations and will upset our status quo. Jesus is the redeemer, He redeemed His people Israel, but He also redeemed all the Gentiles as well (a light to lighten ...). And He did it by His death and resurrection. He did it not by becoming just King of Israel, but by becoming the eternal King of All.

What did this look like for the people of Israel? Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

When God breaks in, the old is torn down before the new and perfect kingdom can be established. It is never comfortable when God appears. He defies our expectations. He does things that upset us. He brings about the fall and rising again of many.

The thing is ... that God will break into our lives everyday. He re-creates us every morning if we open ourselves up to Him. There is no ordinary day with Jesus, no business as usual. Some days He may be louder, more obvious, than others, but He is always coming to our temples, usually in the still, small voice, causing quite a stir, if we only open our gates to Him.

Let us therefore always seek His presence in the moments of our lives. Let us conscientiously touch the transcendent in the routine, the good routine, of our prayers. And may we be sensitive to how He is working in us, tearing down the old and recreating us more in the likeness of His Son.

Let us pray

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.