

Year A, February 2, 2020

4 Epiphany/Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple
Christ Church, Mexia

Today is a very special day – and no, not because of the Super Bowl, or Groundhog’s Day, or Linda’s birthday – though all of those are special, especially the latter. What I am referring to is the fact that a major feast day, the presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple, falls on this Sunday, and therefore takes precedence over the fourth Sunday of Epiphany, when we would traditionally talk about the Sermon on the Mount.

Just as a reminder, there were essentially three ceremonies each Jewish boy had to undergo in the first century. The first was circumcision, which is recorded in verse 21, the one just before our reading began today. It was also the time that the child received his name.

The second was the redemption of the first-born (Num 18:16). The firstborn male, human and animal (Ex 13:2), belonged to God and the parents had to pay a sum of five shekels – about one month’s wage – to the priests in order to buy back their son from God. Luke is silent on this particular point.

But the third, the purification after childbirth, is the focus of the scripture today. The feast of the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we refer to it, occurs 40 days after Christmas, because a woman who gave birth to a male child was considered unclean for that period and could not go to the Temple. BTW, after the birth of a female child, a woman was considered unclean for 80 days. Anyway, at the end of the 40-day period, she had to bring the male child and present him at the Temple. A lamb as a burnt offering and a young pigeon for a sin offering was the usual requirement. Of course, if you are good at detail, you may recall that Luke reports, “a pair of turtledoves or two pigeons.” And that is correct, for that was the allowable offering of the poor, as allowed by Leviticus. Once again, the author of Luke calls attention to the humble and ordinary home to which Jesus was born and that he was Jewish.

While these are interesting facts, the most interesting part of the scripture is what happens when Jesus is brought into the Temple to be presented. Jesus is recognized for who he is by Simeon and Anna. And so recognition becomes the focus of my remarks today. This reminds me of the story of a man lying in a road; when a police officer

arrives, he shouts: 'Officer, my mother-in-law knocked me down with her car!' 'Are you sure it was your mother-in-law?' asked the officer. 'Absolutely,' the man said. 'I'd recognize that laugh anywhere.'

But how did Simeon and Anna recognize Jesus as the Savior – special of God – from all of the other infants who must have been brought to the Temple that day? Well, they were both in the Temple worshipping, and Luke points out that Simeon came in the "Spirit" to the Temple. So it would seem to be the work of the Holy Spirit. And Anna "never left the Temple and day and night she worshipped with fastings and prayer." She too must have been deeply spiritual.

But what does that mean for us today? To me, it begs the question of how do we recognize Christ in each other? Because Christ is in everyone – and yes, I know that some people are very adept at hiding the Christ within them. But Christ is there, no matter how difficult it may be to see him.

It may be easier here at church, where we more easily feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, but even here there are moments, there are some people... Right? So, how much harder is it for us "out there," when we are removed from the Eucharist, the ethereal sounds of the choir, the company of people we do know and love?

But it is essential for us to conduct ourselves as Christians, if we are to be recognized as Christians, if we are to be the kind of people with whom others want to associate, from whom others want to learn more about God. Others must be able to recognize us as Christians, and not hypocrites.

Think for a moment about someone you have met or known whom you felt was truly a spiritual person or in whom Christ was truly evident. How did that person make you feel? What about them allowed you to recognize them?

These are the things I would like for you to think about today: how can we better let others recognize Christ in us, and how can we do better at recognizing Christ in them?

In the name of the One God – the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.