

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Reading I

Malachi 3:1-4

Thus says the Lord GOD:
Lo, I am sending my messenger
to prepare the way before me;
And suddenly there will come to the temple
the LORD whom you seek,
And the messenger of the covenant whom you desire.
Yes, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.
But who will endure the day of his coming?
And who can stand when he appears?
For he is like the refiner's fire,
or like the fuller's lye.
He will sit refining and purifying silver,
and he will purify the sons of Levi,
Refining them like gold or like silver
that they may offer due sacrifice to the LORD.
Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem
will please the LORD,
as in the days of old, as in years gone by.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 24:7, 8, 9, 10

R. (8) Who is this king of glory? It is the Lord!

Lift up, O gates, your lintels;
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

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

Who is this king of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.

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

Lift up, O gates, your lintels;
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

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

Who is this king of glory?
The LORD of hosts; he is the king of glory.

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

Reading II

Hebrews 2:14-18

Since the children share in blood and flesh,
Jesus likewise shared in them,
that through death he might destroy the one
who has the power of death, that is, the Devil,
and free those who through fear of death
had been subject to slavery all their life.
Surely he did not help angels
but rather the descendants of Abraham;
therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters
in every way,
that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God
to expiate the sins of the people.
Because he himself was tested through what he suffered,
he is able to help those who are being tested.

Alleluia

Luke 2:32

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

A light of revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

When the days were completed for their purification
according to the law of Moses,
Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord,
just as it is written in the law of the Lord,
Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,
and to offer the sacrifice of
a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,
in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon.
This man was righteous and devout,
awaiting the consolation of Israel,
and the Holy Spirit was upon him.
It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit
that he should not see death
before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.
He came in the Spirit into the temple;
and when the parents brought in the child Jesus
to perform the custom of the law in regard to him,
he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go
in peace, according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel.”

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him;
and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,
“Behold, this child is destined
for the fall and rise of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be contradicted
-and you yourself a sword will pierce-
so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”
There was also a prophetess, Anna,
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.
She was advanced in years,
having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage,
and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.
She never left the temple,
but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.
And coming forward at that very time,
she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child
to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions
of 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 favor of God was upon him.

Exegesis

Malachi 3:1-4

The Prophet that we have come to know as Malachi lived during the time of the Restoration, the time that immediately followed the Babylonian Exile. The Israelite people are about the arduous task of rebuilding their temple, their city and their lives.

Most scholars seem to agree that Malachi was not the Prophet's real name. The Hebrew word *malachi* simply means *my messenger*. The thought is that because the prophet was so critical of the infidelity of the people and especially his sharp critique relative to the short comings of the priests and rulers of the people, the Prophet used the anonymous pseudo name Malachi.

The *Book of Malachi* begins, "An oracle. The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi." (Ma 1:1). The Prophet reveals himself as God's messenger. His real name is not important. He is simply a mouthpiece for Yahweh.

The first two chapters set the stage for Chapter 3. They are strong indictments of the priests, the rulers, and the people. The priests are accused of offering polluted food on the altar of Yahweh, see Malachi 1:6. Relative to the infidelity of the people the Prophet chides, "Why then do we break faith with each other, violating the covenant of our fathers? Judah had broken faith; an abominable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. Judah has profaned the temple which the Lord loves, and has married an idolatrous woman. (Ma 2:11).

It is important to keep in mind the prophesy of Ezekiel who was carried off into Babylon with the Exiles shortly prior to this time. Again, it was thought to be the infidelity of the people, the priests and the rulers that caused this great calamity and the destruction of the temple and their city. Ezekiel has a vision of the Glory of God leaving the temple. It was in the year 592 B.C. "Then the glory of the Lord left the threshold of the temple and rested upon the cherubim... And the glory of the Lord rose from the city and took a stand on the mountain which is to the east of the city." (Ez 10:18, 23). The glory of God was seen to rise from the temple via the Mount of Olives.

Now the Prophet, who calls himself Malachi, during this period of Restoration, reveals a promise of Yahweh to return to His Temple. "And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, He is coming says the Lord of hosts." (Ma 3:1).

In the following verses, i.e., vs 2 through 4, the Prophet Malachi uses the analogy of the refiner's fire refining and purifying silver. As metal is heated to very high temperatures the impurities are burned off and then as the metal cools the molecules realign without the impurities that once separated them and the metal becomes stronger, i.e. tempered. As enumerated in the first two chapters the Prophet sees a need for purification. In the presence of the Yahweh there will be a purification. There is a need to burn off the darkness and sin that weakens and corrupts. The process is most often painful but like tempered metal the people will emerge stronger and more faithful.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 24:7, 8, 9, 10

Psalm 24 consists of 10 verses and is titled *The Glory of God in Procession to Zion*. Verses 1 and 2 proclaim the Glory of the Lord, the creator of all things and the One who conquers darkness and chaos.

Verses 3 through 6 proclaim a purification necessary to stand before the Lord. “Who may go up the mountain of the Lord? Who can stand in His holy place? The clean of hand and the pure of heart, who are not devoted to idols. Who have not sworn falsely... Such are the people that love the Lord, that seek the face of the God of Jacob.” (Ps 24:3-4, 6).

Our pericope, verses 7-10, describe a desire for God and an opening of the heart and soul to receive God. The imagery is that of opening a gate for God to enter. It describes the victorious return of Yahweh to His dwelling, i.e., the temple.

Lift up your heads, O gates. In one Canaanite myth, the gods with heads bowed cower at the challenge of the powers of chaos. When the creator god returns from battling these forces the assembled gods hear his triumphant cry (“Lift up your heads!”) and acclaim him king. In this demythologized version, the gods are replaced with the gates of Jerusalem.¹

Hebrews 2:14-18

Hebrews reflects on the OT ritual priesthood, e.g. the priesthood of Melchizedek as a foreshadowing of the Priesthood of Christ. Chapter 7 in the NAB is entitled *Melchizedek, a Type of Christ*. The OT priesthood held the priest to be a mediator between God and the people. The priest was called to mediate the Word of God to the people and to bring the prayers and sacrifices of the people to God. The priest typically was chosen from the first son of a family lineage. The king or the leader was considered anointed by God and served in a capacity of priest as well as ruler. All manifestations of OT ritual priesthood are merely and architype of the Great High Priest, Jesus the Christ.

Whereas the OT Priesthood served the Old Covenant, Jesus is the Priest of the New and Everlasting Covenant sealed with the blood of the Lamb of God. The OT priest entered the Holy of Holies once per year on the day of atonement to offer the animal sacrifice to God for his sins and for the sins of the people. OT priests died and were often replaced by their son(s). The priesthood of Jesus will never pass away. This is the fulfillment of the promise of Yahweh to establish this eternal priesthood from the lineage of King David (See Ps 110:4). There is only one Priest, Jesus. The priesthood of the NT of the New Covenant calls for those who are called by God and ordained to stand in *Persona Christi*, in the person of Christ.

Our pericope is a part of a section in *Hebrews* that is titled *Exaltation through Abasement*. Jesus must humble Himself to share in our humanity, our flesh and blood. In the words of St. Anselm: “What is not assumed is not redeemed.” Ultimately “He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted Him.” (Phil 2:8-9).

1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; page 530.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 2:22-40

The *Presentation of the Lord in the Temple* is the revelation of Christ to the world and the revelation of God's universal call to Salvation for all people, i.e., for all the nations, Jew and Gentile alike. It is about the return of God's glory to the temple.

Mary and Joseph are good and faithful Jewish parents, who are loyal to the Law of God. Mary seeks to fulfill the Law of Moses by bringing the necessary offering to the temple for her ritual purification. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites: When a woman has conceived and gives birth to a boy, she shall be unclean for seven days, with the same uncleanness as her menstrual period. On the eighth day, the flesh of the boy's foreskin shall be circumcised.'" (Lev 12:1). "When the days for her purification for a son or daughter are fulfilled, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the meeting tent a yearling lamb for a holocaust and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering." (Lev 12:6).

"If, however, she cannot afford a lamb, she may take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for the holocaust and the other for the sin offering." (Lev 12:8). Mary takes the option of the poor and offers two turtledoves or two pigeons. Most scholars suggest that this emphasizes the fact that Mary and Joseph were poor, and certainly that is true. In addition, I would suggest that Mary did offer the sacrificial lamb to God in the person of Jesus, her Son, the most perfect unblemished lamb, the Lamb of God!

Mary again fulfills the Law of Moses by bringing her Son to the temple to be presented to the Lord. "The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'Consecrate to Me every first-born that opens the womb among the Israelites, both of man and beast, for it belongs to me.'" (Ex 13:1-2). "You shall dedicate to the Lord every son that opens the womb..." (Ex 13:12).

There awaits in the temple two expectant souls, Simeon and Anna. The name *Simeon* means *God has heard*. Simeon was filled with the Holy Spirit and was praying to God that he might see His Salvation. God has heard him. He now holds the Savior in his arms.

He was awaiting the consolation of Israel. The word that is translated here as *awaiting* is sometimes translated as *expectant*. It is a word that Luke uses in his narrative for those positively disposed and open to God's visitation.² Luke will use this term again relative to Joseph of Arimathea: "He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was *awaiting* the Kingdom of God." (Lk 23:51). Luke will later use the term *consolation*, or *paraklesis* in the original Greek, in the story of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*. Speaking of Lazarus' place in Heaven we are told, "but now he is comforted (*paraklesis*) here." (Lk 16:25).

My eyes have seen Your salvation. Simeon is holding the Savior in his arms. The name *Joshua/Jesus* literally means *Yahweh Saves*.

A Light for revelation to the Gentiles. This is the revelation of the universal call to salvation. "God will that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of truth." (1 Tim 2:3). Luke will use this same image in Acts 13:47: "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 2:22-40

This child is destined for the rise and fall of many. This image captures the prophesy of Isaiah. “Yet He shall be a snare, an obstacle and a stumbling stone to both the houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to those who dwell in Jerusalem; and many shall stumble and fall, broken, snared, and captured.” (Is 8:14-15). Luke will use this image again in *The Parable of the Tenant Farmers*: “The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be dashed to pieces.” (Lk 20:17-18). Luke paints a clear picture of the acceptance and the rejection of Jesus. The choices are twofold, i.e., rising or falling.

And you yourself a sword shall pierce. The words that are translated here as *you yourself* is *psyche* in the original Greek. *Psyche* is often translated as *soul*. Mary will be pierced to the depth of her soul upon the Crucifixion of her Son.

The name *Anna* means *grace* or *favor*. She too will be favored to see Jesus with her own eyes. Like Simeon, she is expectant, open to and awaiting the presence of God.

Reflection

At a time when the people had turned away from God the Prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the Spirit of God leaving the temple. (Ez 10:18). He also had a vision of a dry-boned people, people without the Spirit of God in them, people existing but not really living. He also had a vision of God one day returning to fill his people again with His Spirit, and he had a vision of the Spirit of God returning to the temple. As Jesus is presented in the temple the prophesy of Ezekiel is fulfilled, God returns to His temple. Simeon entered the temple, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. He came in the Spirit into the temple. And Jesus was there, and where He is so are the Father and the Holy Spirit!

As the people strayed from God there was a darkness that hovered over them. There was an absence of light. Light is of God and without God there is only darkness. In the beginning God said, "Let there be Light and there was Light." Light represents, love and goodness and truth and fidelity to God. The devil is the force of all that opposes light. There has always been a battle raging in our world between the forces of light and darkness, life and death, goodness and evil.

The Word of God reveals Jesus as a light entering the darkness of our world. Jesus is the Light of the World. "The Light has entered the darkness, and the darkness will never overcome it. But people preferred darkness to light." (Jn 1:5). When we first wake up in the morning and turn on a bright light it can be painful to the eyes. Or when in a darkened place for a long time like a movie theater and first come out into the light it takes time to adjust. In a similar fashion the light of Christ exposes areas of darkness in our lives, and it can be painful as the purification process begins.

In our first reading, the Prophet Malachi uses the analogy of the refiner's fire refining and purifying silver. As metal is heated to very high temperatures the impurities are burned off and then as the metal cools the molecules realign without the impurities that once separated them, and the metal becomes stronger, i.e. tempered. In the light of Christ, we too burn off the darkness and sin that weakens us. The process is most often painful but like tempered metal we emerge stronger each time.

We ask that same Spirit that returned to the temple of our souls to refill us as we pray,
Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us
Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.
Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

I had an aunt that was very dear to me that passed away a few years ago. She was a very beloved high school English teacher for 35 years. On the front of her desk for most of those years she displayed two old adages relative to teaching and learning engraved on plaques on the front of her teacher's desk. The one on the left side read, *When the student is ready the teacher appears*. The other read, *They will not care how much you know until they know how much you care*. Both of those age-old sayings came to mind as I was praying with the Scripture for the *Presentation of the Lord*.

For many years during my young adulthood, I had strayed from the Lord. It was not a conscious or intentional act on my part. As I reflect on that time I realize now that I had slowly drifted from the Lord. I was still practicing my faith in a very mechanical way. I was attending Mass on Sunday and Holy Days. I had essentially relegated my relationship with God to one hour on Sunday. My focus had changed to my career and money had become the new god in my life. The farther I drifted from God the emptier I felt. There was something missing in my life, but at the time, I did not know what it was. I was ready for a change. I was the student ready for the teacher to appear. I was ready for God.

Like the Prodigal Son who traveled to the big emptiness, I decided to get up and to turn back to the God that I once knew. It was in that moment, that movement, that I experienced the Holy Spirit rush into my soul. In my seeking I had found. It was the moment that I opened my heart that God rushed in. In that moment I felt the embrace of unconditional love as never before. Lord, may I never separate myself from You again!

The experience of that love has driven me to come to know the Lord. Knowing how much God cares for me, despite my sins and infidelity, has inspired me to come to know this God who loves me so. It has driven me to prayer and worship, and to an unsatiable hunger for God's Word in Sacred Scripture and in contemplative prayer. I was once seeking God in all things, often in all the wrong places. Now that God is in my soul, I see God in all things and all places. God has given me an entirely new and different prism through which to see and live. Once I was viewing life as in a dark, black and white motion picture, and I began to see things in high-definition color. All of life became clear and bright.

Like the event that we call *The Presentation of the Lord*, the Holy Spirit has returned to the temple, the temple of my soul. Lord, may I never depart from You again!

