



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
**in the City of New York**  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
**www.SaintThomasChurch.org**

**Sunday, February 3, 2019**

*The Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ (transferred)*

*The Blessing of Light  
and Festal Evensong  
at 4:00 p.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Right Reverend Allen K. Shin,  
*Bishop Suffragan of the Diocese of New York*  
*on*  
1 John 3:1-8

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### **Blessed, Broken, Healed, and Given**

In Nomine.

The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple is one of the oldest feasts celebrated in the church. The diary of the fourth century pilgrim, named Egeria, records an octave celebration of this feast with a solemn procession to Constantine's Basilica of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. The feast is called *Hypapante* in Greek which means "meeting" and describes Simeon and Ann's meeting of the Messiah. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition this feast marks the end of the forty-day Nativity season.

In the Western Latin tradition, this feast has been called the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. The Law of Moses stipulates that the mother who bears a child is to carry out a purification ritual in the Temple by making a holocaust offering of a lamb and a pigeon or a turtledove. If she could not afford a lamb, she could offer two pigeons or two turtledoves, which Mary did according to Luke's Gospel. This shows that Joseph and Mary were from a less well-to-do background. The feast has also been called Candlemas because of the tradition of blessing new candles on this feast day during the medieval times.

Up to this point, Luke has masterfully weaved stories about various incredible events surrounding the birth of this child—the angel appearing to Mary and announcing that she was to bear a child, the son of God, Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth who was also carrying a child, Mary's great song of glory to God, and the angels proclaiming the birth of the Messiah to the shepherds in the field, and the shepherds, in turn, running to greet the newborn babe. When they told all they heard to Mary, Luke tells us that Mary "*treasured* all these words and pondered them in her heart." Then, the culmination of these incredible vignettes is the story of an ordinary ancient Jewish custom of presenting the firstborn son in the temple and the purification ritual of the child's mother.

Bringing a new-born babe out in public for the first time is both an exciting and anxious thing for any mother. It's like opening a secret treasure to share with others. In presenting her babe Jesus, Mary is opening the treasure of her heart and flesh to share with the world. And the treasure she has been keeping all these days, as it turns out, is none other than God's salvation itself. The ancient Messianic prophecy of the redemption of Israel is now revealed and fulfilled in this little child whose name is "God saves." What a treasure it is indeed! What an amazing gift of grace Mary has received!

When Mary hands Jesus over to Simeon, she hands the fragile humanity of Jesus, his soul and his body, to be blessed by God. When Simeon hands the child back to Mary, she, in turn, receives three mystical gifts through this holy child. Firstly, she is given the mystical gift of the Priesthood of Christ. She is entrusted with nurturing the vocation of the priesthood in Jesus. Thus, we, who are baptized and receive his Body and Blood, are also called into the High Priesthood of Christ. Just as Jesus is himself the sacrificial Lamb of God once offered for our redemption, we offer ourselves for the on-going redemptive mission of God, the ministry of reconciliation and communion.

Secondly, Mary is given the gift of the Messianic hope, which has been prophesied since the ancient days and now densely embodied in this babe. Her vocation is to treasure and nurture this hope in her heart and to kindle the flame of this Messianic hope. We, who are called into the same Messianic hope of Christ, also share this mission and vocation of kindling the flame of hope of justice, mercy and love and proclaiming that hope to the world.

Finally, when Simeon hands Jesus back to Mary, she receives a humanity which is caught up in God's plan of salvation and has become one with God's love and compassion. As Simeon sings, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation" and handed the babe over to his mother, the very salvation of God is now entrusted to Mary for her care and nurture. We, who have received Jesus into our hearts, are also caught up in the same salvation of God, entrusted to each of us. Think of the weight of that awesome vocation. If a sword will pierce Mary's own soul in her vocation, a sword will pierce our own souls also in our own Christian vocation.

At the center of this mystery is a fragile, innocent, little child. To Simeon and Anna this child has turned out to be the promise of God for the consolation of his people Israel. This is not a mere beautiful and mystical story of the past but also a story of our present life and vocation as Christians. This story invites us to recognize the mystery of salvation in the ordinary events of our own lives. As the body of Christ, we, too, are wrapped up in this cosmic event and are lifted up with Christ and offered to God in our own Christian life and vocation.

In this evening's reading from the First Letter of John, it is written, "When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2b).

We are each a child of God and called to be like Christ. In God's eye we are each a consolation of God. St. Augustine said that as the body of Christ we are constantly blessed, broken, healed, and given. This is the salvation paradigm of life Christ has revealed to us. We come to be like Christ and come into union with Christ by living the same salvation paradigm of life: blessed, broken, healed, and given. So, receive the treasure of God's consolation and peace and carry that treasure out into the world with you. Carry the joy of that treasure in your heart that others may see the light of Christ shining in your face.

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,  
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles,  
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.