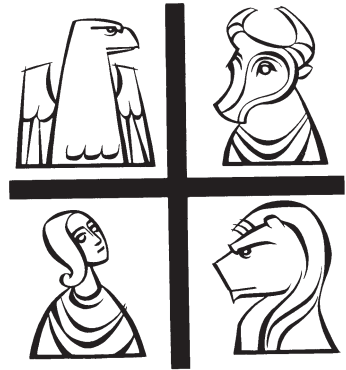


Reading Luke in Lent



Gospel of Luke 2:20-52

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God
for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised,
he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was
conceived in the womb.

Jesus Presented at the Temple

22 And 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 male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord')
24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said 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,
and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel,
and the Holy Spirit was upon him.
26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit
that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.
27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus,
to do for him according to the custom of the Law,
28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,
29 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation
31 that 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 his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him.
34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,
'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel,
and for a sign that is opposed
35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also),
so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.
She was advanced in years,
having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,
37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple,
worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.
38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God
and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth

39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord,
they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.
And the favour of God was upon him.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.
42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.
43 And when the feast was ended,
as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.
His parents did not know it,
44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey,
but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances,
45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.
46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers,
listening to them and asking them questions.
47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.
48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him,
'Son, why have you treated us so?
Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.'
49 And he said to them,
'Why were you looking for me?
Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'
50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.
51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.
And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.
52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.

Reflection

Luke's story of the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus began in the temple and here returns to the temple in Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary seek to fulfil the law but can only afford a pair of turtledoves (this is the option for those who cannot afford a lamb and a turtledove). One of Luke's themes is God's compassion for the poor — already expressed in Mary's Magnificat. One of his other themes is that through Jesus salvation is offered to all which is what Simeon says in his blessing (the Nunc Dimittis) — a light of revelation to the Gentiles. Luke is also interested in the role of women in the story of Jesus and gives a brief pen portrait of Anna, who recognises the Messiah and 'speaks of him to all'.

An intriguing way of reading the story of Jesus in the temple is pick up the echoes of the resurrection narratives in Luke. It takes place in Jerusalem, his parents go searching for him on the third day and Jesus' first words in the Gospel are 'Why were you looking for me?' The angels at the tomb say to the women 'Why do you seek the living among the dead?'

- Simeon tells Mary that Jesus will be a sign of contradiction. What aspects of contemporary life demand a counter sign?
- Jesus takes the role of teacher in the temple. Where do we need to listen to the questions of young people?

Prayer

Inspired by your Spirit, Lord,
we gather in your temple to welcome your Son.
Enlighten our minds
and lay bare our inmost thoughts.
Purify your people,
and make us obedient to the demands of your law,
so that we may mature in wisdom
and grow to full stature in your grace.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.

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