

## **Views from the Pews: Presenting the Christ child in the Temple**

The law of Moses required that, forty days after the arrival of a first-born son, his parents must present him in the Temple, and offer a sacrifice to God on his behalf. Since the Exodus, every first born male among the children and livestock of Israel had to be set apart and consecrated to the Lord (Exodus 13:2-10). Firstborn males from their livestock had to be sacrificed, but firstborn sons could be redeemed by offering an alternative sacrifice: a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Luke 2:24). So, as always obedient to the Law, Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the Temple to offer their sacrificial birds for the redemption of their firstborn son (Luke 2:22–38).

The scene described by Luke includes some beautiful touching details. Simeon and Anna appear nowhere else in scripture, so little is known of either of them except what we read here. Simeon was ‘righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel’. that is, for the coming of the Messiah, ‘the Lord’s Christ’ (v. 26). God had promised him that he would see that longed-for event before he died, so the Holy Spirit made sure he was there when Mary and Joseph arrived at the Temple. Simeon’s words have echoed down the ages, beloved and familiar to generations of Anglicans repeating them in the *Nunc dimittis* at every traditional Evensong. The phrase *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart* is apparently based on the formulation for the manumission of a slave. Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph, and so did Anna. She spoke of Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Mary had not forgotten the message of the angel Gabriel, that Jesus would be ‘the son of the Most High’ (Luke 1:32), nor the words of the angel to the shepherds, that he was to be the ‘Saviour, Christ the Lord’ (Luke 1:11). She had been ‘pondering them in her heart’ ever since. So Simeon’s prophesy that her child would be ‘thy salvation....a light for

revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel' would have come as welcome confirmation of Jesus' destiny as God's redemption, not only of Israel, but also of the whole world (2:32). Only at Calvary, years later, did she also understand Simeon's warning, that 'a sword will pierce through your own soul also' (2:35).

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