

## THE POWER OF TESTIMONY

*to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ!*

SPRINGLINE PARISH - EPIPHANY 5 - YEAR C - 2019

### Introduction to the Scripture Readings (Year C)

#### Ist Reading: 1 Malachi 3. 1-5

Malachi makes a prophecy that God will send a messenger to his Temple; Christians see this promise fulfilled in the events commemorated by this feast. When his messenger comes to the Temple, the worship offered there will again be pleasing to the Lord.

#### Gospel: Luke 2. 22-40

The Gospel describes what happened when Jesus was presented in the Temple. The Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, to be welcomed by the faithful “*anawim*”, Simeon and Anna.

#### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for speaking to us today through the reading of the Scriptures. We have listened to your word. We now ask you to open our hearts and our minds to understand and accept what your word is telling us today. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### Introduction

Funny how times flies! Two years this day Alida and I first came to this lovely part of the country called Lincolnshire! We met some of you that day before the interview. You have been so good to us and so patient with us since then!

Epiphany Period – time of the manifestation of Jesus to the world. Today’s reading emphasises another event in the life of Jesus that manifests and affirms Jesus as the Saviour of the world.

The message that strikes out for me from the Word of God today is this: the power of a testimony or a story of faith to spread the “Good News” of Jesus Christ. Let me explain.

## 1. Purification – Redemption – Presentation (Dedication of first-born)

In the gospel of today we have heard the story of two people, both of them very old, Simeon and Anna. They were devoted to God in the Temple – Simon, a man “righteous and devout and looking for the consolation of Israel” and Anna “worshipping God with fasting and prayer.”

They met Joseph and Mary who had brought Jesus to the temple. It was the tradition according to the Mosaic Law that a newly born male child would be circumcised<sup>1</sup> after eight days and after a month, the mother of the child would come to the temple for a ritual called ‘purification’ after the birth of the child which involved the offering of a lamb or for the poorer people, as was the case of Mary and Joseph, a dove as burnt offering. In the case of a female child the mother would come to the temple after 80 days for the same ritual.

It was also the occasion when the child was ‘redeemed’ so to say and presented to God in the temple. Again there was an offering symbolising the ‘buying back’ (‘redeeming’) of the child from God because the child and all life belonged to God. 5 shekels were given as offering and further a dove was offered as sin offering in the case of the presentation/dedication of the child. All this was done according The Law just to reassure us that Jesus fulfilled all the laws of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled all the Mosaic Laws.

## 2. Simeon and Anna

Embody the heart of the Temple Cult. They are devoted to the service of God although they are not priests. *You don't have to be priests to serve God!*

**Simeon** (“God has heard”) is an old man waiting for the fulfilment of the prophecies regarding the Messiah and when Jesus was brought by Mary and Joseph to the Temple, he discerned with the help of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was the longed-for Messiah. He saw the child as the fulfilment of all the prophecies in the Old Testament – a saviour for all people, ‘*a light*’ to reveal God to the nations and not merely for the Jews. Here is the first mention of the universal redemption promised in the Old Testament. *Simeon acknowledges Jesus as The Christ!* This is epiphany! This is manifestation of Christ! Salvation to Israel, glorification of god's people and revelation to the Gentiles! God's love embraces God's people Israel and then encircles the others; the nations are heirs of God's promises.

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<sup>1</sup> Circumcision on the 8<sup>th</sup> day for the Jewish male children denoted the separation from the Gentiles and the unique relationship with God.

Anna (“Grace, Favour”) is another embodiment of waiting for the Lord. She gives her silent witness to the meaning of Jesus for those who long for the redemption of Israel. Anna testifies to the significance of Jesus to “all who are looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” Jerusalem is “Israel”, the place where God’s deliverance of his people would start.

God would bring deliverance to the Jewish people through Jesus who is “a sign of hope”, like Simeon said Jesus the “light” to reveal God to the nations.

### 3. Stories and Testimonies are what Bible is all about!

The key words today are these words of Simeon: “*My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel,*”

The testimony of Simeon is absolutely important in the context off the majority of Jews who failed to recognise Jesus as Messiah and Saviour and the fulfilment of the prophecies. We wonder: *How is that majority of the Jews failed to recognise Jesus?*

The prophetic testimony of Simeon and Anna, two elderly people who believed, accepted and testified to the Messiah – that is something absolutely great!

The importance and significance of testimony for spreading the good news of Jesus and his mission to the world as the ‘light of the nations’.

Testimony (story) touch people’s hearts while theology tends to touch people’s minds. We need both.

- Theology – Teaching
- Testimony – Inspiration

Personally, although I have done a load of studies for years, I would value more greatly the importance of testimony for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. There is a lot of difference between people who know Christ and people who love and follow Christ!

“Examples move” and “attract”.<sup>2</sup> We know the power of examples!

The Church has grown by the testimony of the disciples and apostles of Jesus and followers and saints throughout history.

Stories and testimonies are powerful!

### 4. The Word speaks to us today here!

*If we wish the Church in Springline to grow we must share our stories and testimonies of faith in Christ with others.* This is crucial. Everything else is secondary.

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<sup>2</sup> “Exempla trahunt” (old Latin proverb!)

The problem is:

- *Do we know and love Jesus Christ?*
- *Have we been converted to Jesus Christ?*
- *Have you accepted Christ as your Lord and Saviour?*

Paul:

- *“I can do all things in Jesus Christ who strengthens me.”*
- *“Life to me is Christ and to die is gain.”*
- *“anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has gone; behold the new is here.”*

Alpha/Emmaus and scores of courses are available to explore deeper Christianity and come to know and love Jesus.

Laying on of hands is one way you can receive the Holy Spirit into your lives – ancient, traditional, biblical ways.

Confirmation – a decision to follow Christ.

Holy Communion – we are so fortunate to receive the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, a fantastic opportunity for an encounter with Jesus. Many people encounter Jesus and are healed and touched by him in Holy Communion.

**To conclude:**

2 years are over and I am wondering: “What on earth am I doing here?” Am I wasting my time here?

I want to re-affirm my basic mandate here – “cure of souls”!

*My primary task and mission here is to help you know and love Jesus Christ. Everything else comes after! And I will continue to invite you and encourage you to know, love and follow Jesus Christ.*

I am not here to give you a good time on a Sunday morning, make you feel nice and nothing else. I would want to do all I can to serve you and to help you encounter the Living God in Jesus Christ

**Let us pray:**

Lord Jesus, I accept you as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. I accept you now as my Lord and my Saviour. I hand over my life into your hands. I repent of my sins and trust you to forgive me and ask you to grant me your Holy Spirit and the gifts of your Holy Spirit. Help me to trust you more and to follow you every day of my life. Amen.

[ST Mattapally]