

Sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist | Presentation of Christ in the Temple | 1 February 2026

Readings: Malachi 3.1, Hebrews 2.14-end, Luke 2.22-40

O God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts to bring us to the knowledge of your glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The role of the preacher is to get people excited about God.

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I read those words some time ago, and they made quite an impression on me. Whether I have ever made anyone excited about God I do not know, but it does seem a good thing to aim for. Some may feel uncomfortable with the words 'excited' and 'God' appearing in the same sentence but, it is not referring to something frivolous or artificial, rather to a deep spiritual experience. Getting excited about God can be described as something that exceeds simple happiness, experienced by an overwhelming sense such as of peace, love, a relationship with God.

So, turning to our readings. We heard Malachi's prophecy predicting that 'the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple to purify His people.' Luke gives us the fulfilment of that, writing of the infant Jesus being brought into the temple by Mary and Joseph for his presentation, only forty days after His birth. This arrival is 'sudden' and 'unexpected', as he arrives not as a conquering king, but as a helpless child. Luke and Hebrews together provide a link between the infant Jesus in the temple and the adult Christ on the cross. Luke gives the story of Jesus's humble infancy, while Hebrews explains the profound, purpose behind that incarnation.

Going back to my word 'excited', do we find excitement in Luke's Gospel account of the presentation?

The word is not used but nevertheless I would suggest that there was some amount of excitement going on.

To begin with Simeon. Many assume that Simeon was an old man, about to die but we are not actually told that in the reading. We do not know his age. Would he see the revelation and then die? In our lives there may be times when something truly remarkable happens, maybe to a close relative, which brings out a response like 'now I can die happy', but not necessarily at the proximity of our death. What we do know about Simeon is that he was a man who was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. Many people looked for the consolation that would come about with the arrival of the promised Messiah. But for Simeon there was something extra special. Guided by the Holy Spirit he went into the temple just at the right time. And so he was there when the child Jesus arrived carried by Mary and Joseph. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit Simeon recognised the one who would indeed bring salvation. Just think how exciting

that must have been. What does he do? Having taken the child into his arms, he praised God. And then pours forth his lovely prayer.

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for 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.'

Surely a moment of great excitement?

And what about Mary and Joseph? We read that the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about their child. Could it be that they were excited by what they heard? It is interesting to think about the experiences of Mary and Joseph. They had both met angels bringing them messages before the birth of Jesus. Then there had been all the excitement surrounding the birth of Jesus. Afterwards though they must then have settled down to life as normal as could be, bringing up their special child. And then we read that they took the child Jesus to the temple 'to do for him what was customary under the law.' Would they have expected a prophecy? Probably not. We can see though that God, through the Holy Spirit, was moving them onto the next step, the upbringing of their child in a special way. I imagine a mixture of excitement but also perhaps some apprehension?

Simeon blessed them and then said to Mary the mother of Jesus, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' We can only imagine what thoughts must have gone through Mary's mind on hearing those words.

And now can we use our imaginations to picture what it must have been like to witness what was happening? Especially if we had been close enough to hear what was being said by Simeon, and to see the response of Mary and Joseph?

And of course, let us not forget Anna.

She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. A person speaking to anyone around in the way she did would surely have portrayed a sense of excitement. The only person I see as not experiencing excitement would have been the child Jesus. The one though who would grow and become strong, filled with wisdom; with the favour of God upon him.

Have we ever experienced excitement about matters of faith? Perhaps not as dramatic as the people we are thinking about but still of real value in our lives of faith.

I want now to tell you a story from my life. In December 1991 I attended a bishops selection conference in Chester. If you are not familiar, such a conference is about determining whether a

person is called to, and suitable for, ordained ministry in the Church of England. For me it was not a happy time, and I left on a cold, foggy afternoon to walk back to Chester railway station feeling quite low. On the way I was stopped by a man begging for money. Rightly or wrongly my natural response would have been to just ignore him - but I didn't. It might have been because one the topics considered at the conference had come to mind - 'what is the good news for the poor?'

But, for whatever reason, I did take a pound coin out of my pocket and put it the man's hand. And then I walked on. I had only gone a few steps when a voice boomed out behind me 'God bless you sir!' That was the blessing I was in need of, and it did send me on with a lifted spirit.

Was that just a coincidental combination of events? Or could it have been that God saw two people, one very low emotionally and spiritually and one in physical need, and that God brought the two together in some way to bring a blessing upon them both? You are free to make your minds up about that, but I believe that God does work in our lives in many ways if we have but minds and hearts to witness them.

And so I return to those people from our gospel reading. Certainly Simeon and Anna, and Mary and Joseph were blessed by God by the power of the Holy Spirit. And at the centre of that time of blessing, joy and yes for me, excitement, there was the very presence of God - in the person of the child Jesus. And we too, by the power of the Holy Spirit can also be aware of the presence of God among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

I can do no better than finish with the prayer I began with:

O God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts to bring us to the knowledge of your glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

John Puxty