

Cork Scripture Group



Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.

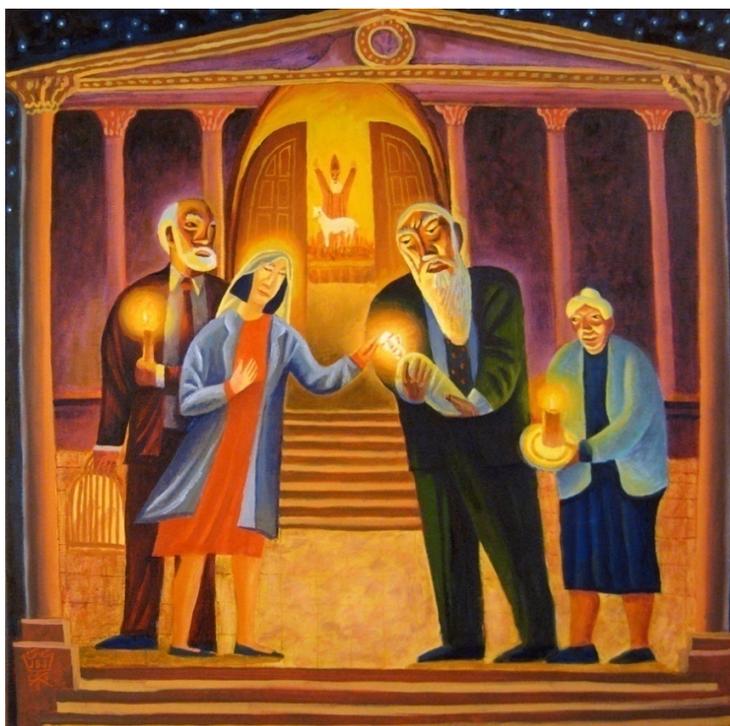
Psalm 119:105

Website: www.corkscripturegroup.com

‘Seasons of Hope: Biblical Perspectives on Hope’

Text and Introduction to the Presentation of the Lord (Luke 2:22-38)

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Luke 2:22-38 (NRS)

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated 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; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which 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 the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ 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.

Some background on the text:

Situating it in the Gospel

The Presentation takes place forty days after the birth of Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, we have already heard the story of the annunciation to Zechariah, the annunciation to Mary, her visit to Elizabeth where she prays the Magnificat, the birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah's praying of the Benedictus. Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem, because of the census that had been called by the emperor, and Jesus is born there. His birth is announced by the sound of angels glorifying God as well as the visit of humble shepherds. Eight days after his birth, he is circumcised and named. Then, 40 days after his birth, the family travel the 5 miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to go to the Temple for the Presentation.

Remember as well that in Luke's Gospel, we haven't heard about the slaughter of the innocents, the visit of the Magi or the flight into Egypt. They are only in Matthew's Gospel.

The importance of the Temple

Luke's Gospel begins and ends in the Temple. When we first meet Zechariah he is offering incense in the sanctuary of the Lord, a duty that only fell to priests once in their lifetimes, and the final scene shows the disciples continually blessing God in the Temple as they await the coming of the Holy Spirit. So, by highlighting that this scene takes place in the Temple, its importance is emphasised.

We are told five times in the course of this passage that Mary and Joseph are here to fulfill the Law of the Lord (2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39), in other words they are law-abiding Jews.

Their reason for going to the Temple

Luke confuses two different rituals here: Mary's purification and the presentation of the first-born to the Lord. Jewish law specified that 40 days after the birth of a male child and 80 days after that of a female, the mother had to undergo purification (Lev 12:2-8). Wealthy people had to offer a lamb for sacrifice while the poor could bring two pigeons or turtle doves. It was only after this that the woman was considered ritually clean and could touch anything holy. The old ritual of 'churching' in the Catholic Church probably had its roots in this idea that women had to be ritually cleansed after childbirth.

The second ritual concerns the offering of the first-born to the Lord. During the Passover, the Lord spared the first-born of the Israelites when all the first born male children of the Egyptians were killed and so Exodus 13:2, 12 states that every first-born male belongs to the Lord. When a hereditary priesthood was established, boys could be redeemed from priestly service by the payment of 5 silver shekels.

Some commentators say that since Luke was a Gentile, he did not understand the rituals and mixed up the two of them but others make the very interesting point that Luke wanted to show the Jesus was consecrated to the Lord and so did not need to be redeemed or ransomed and therefore he focused on the presentation rather than Mary's purification.

The story of the presentation is very similar to the Old Testament story of Hannah bringing her son, Samuel, to the Temple to consecrate him to the Lord (1 Sam 1:24-28).

Upright people

Simeon is described as 'upright, righteous or law-abiding.' That same word is also used about Elizabeth and Zechariah and Joseph of Arimathea, all of whom obey the law of the Lord. When Jesus dies on the cross, the centurion also describes Jesus as an 'upright' man.

Simeon and Anna

Throughout his Gospel, Luke often has parallel stories of men and women. Some commentators say that it is to show equality between men and women. However, when the characters or stories are put side by side, we can learn far more about what is happening by comparing and contrasting the two. Here Simeon and Anna have much in common but they also throw further light on different aspects of the story.

Simeon's Prayer

Seán's presentation a few weeks ago focused on Second Isaiah and its message of hope. Much of Simeon's prayer draws on Second Isaiah. Here are some examples:

Luke 2:29-32	Isaiah
<p>"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."</p>	<p>Is 40:5. "Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Is 42:6. "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations," Is 46:13. "I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory." Is 49:6: He says "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Is 52:9-10: "Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."</p>

Questions to Ponder

- With this background, read the passage a few times and see what messages Luke is trying to convey.
- The story of the Presentation draws very much on the very hopeful message that is found in Deutero-Isaiah. Can you see how this hopeful message shines through both texts?
- Look at the characters Mary, Simeon and Anna. What messages do they have for us?
- Our theme is hope. Can you find any examples of hope in this passage or in these characters?