

February 2, 2025
Presentation/Candlemas, Year C
St. Brigid//Imbolc
Rev. Jennifer S Osheim-Owen

Good Morning. As you've heard, I am Rev. Jennifer Osheim-Owen. I am an ELCA Pastor and I currently serve as part of the Chaplain Team here in town at Williamsburg Landing. On behalf of our Residents and Team Members, I bring you greetings and a thank you for the ministry of presence you provide for your members and friends who live there.

Every now and then I wonder what it is the original conveners of the Lectionary think as they were choosing the scriptures to be read and pondered on in worship each week. As you know, sometimes there seems to be a disconnect between the images of the Old and New Testaments; sometimes they gel a bit better. Sometimes the imagery works better (like pairing the healing of the lepers with the story of Naaman, which we will hear in October this year or on occasion at Thanksgiving time). And some weeks, we take a step or two back in the story and re-visit a previous chapter or two, as is the case this week.

The Gospel writer of Luke begins telling the story of Jesus for his listeners by giving us Jesus' backstory in the first few chapters. Luke is writing to Gentiles, to people who are unfamiliar with the Israelite story, and to a people who (probably) are very familiar with the stories of the gods of Rome and Greece. For us today, it's getting the origin stories of our favorite comic book heroes, heroines and villains... . We have a birth narrative, unexpected encounters with a prophetess and an old, righteous man who give blessings to Mary and Joseph. We hear too the story of a young Jesus teaching in the Temple and the amazement at his words and his wisdom by the men who were there. Luke is giving his hearers, mainly Gentiles, Jesus' street cred before he gets to Jesus' ministry and the meat of the story he's there to tell – God is doing something new in the world and all are invited in to see it and to be a part of it.

Today, February 2nd, marks the mid-point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox and was/is a time when the fires would be lit anew throughout the countryside; continuing to herald the continuation of the light returning to the day. Today also marks, in some places, the ending of the Christmas season – we are 40 days out since we celebrated the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus into the world (*as we remember, 40 is a number filled with meaning throughout scriptures*). Today is also a principal feast in the church – it's a celebration of one of Jesus' major life events, and thus a principal feast. It is the day when the church traditionally blessed all the candles to be used in worship for the coming year in part because of the words of Simeon.... And so, this text from Luke (using the words of Isaiah 49:6, 42, 60**) is used for us, to hear the words of blessing Simeon gives on Mary and Joseph and the infant, Jesus:

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³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Let me circle back to this later.

Mary and Joseph are doing what is required of them. 40 days after the birth of a child, the mother would go present herself in the Temple and participate in the rite of purification – she and the baby would be made ritually clean.

All we are told of Simeon is that he’s righteous and devout. And he’s been told he won’t die until he’s seen the Lord’s Messiah. We learn a bit more about Anna, the prophetess. We hear her lineage, we hear her story – she spends all her time in the Temple, worshiping with prayer and fasting. She too comes to this family and begins to praise God and speak of the child to all.

On the one hand, I’d say there’s amazement on the part of Mary and Joseph at the attention; and yet, the Gospel writers (Luke and Matthew) have already told us of angel visitations and shepherds, of miraculous pregnancies and visitors from far off lands; of God breaking into the world in a new way. Here are two more encounters to ponder in the heart, to carry with us as the story unfolds.

We hear again this week, as we did last, of the scripture being fulfilled in the moment. As a reminder, to fulfill is not always a static verb, it connotes action, especially when it comes to scripture – it’s not that all of scripture is fulfilled in an event, sometimes it is fulfilled when we, the listeners, take action – when we hear the scripture, and it moves us to do something with what we hear – Micah 6 “to do justice, to love mercy,” Deuteronomy & Exodus “to have no other gods; to not kill, to not covet, to not gossip,” from the Newer Testament “do this in remembrance of me.” We believe on the one hand in God who is unchanging and on the other in God who comes anew to each generation – in words and actions that speak to the moment in which we find ourselves.

All this lends itself to “what does this mean for me? what does this mean in today’s world?” It might feel as if it’s becoming more of a challenge to see and hear God in the world around us these days. There is much in the news that might feel chaotic and discombobulating.

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Where do we find the hope? Where do we see the light? – let's circle back for a moment to the words Simeon speaks to Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

(Isaiah 49:6 “for the glory of the world/salvation to the ends of the earth)

I invite you to hear these words from our Baptismal Rite – words of hope and promise to us:

Pour your Holy Spirit upon name: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence.

Name, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

And from the prayer of blessing of the candles for today's celebration of Candlemas:

....You have enriched our lives
with every good and perfect gift;
you have commanded us
to show your splendor to our children
and to praise you with lives of love, justice, and joy.
Accept these candles which we offer in thanksgiving;
may they be to us a sign of Christ,
the Light of the world,
the light no darkness can overcome.
Bring us all at length to your perfect kingdom

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The praise of Anna, the words of Simeon are words for and to us today. We are again invited to be co-creators of the Kingdom of God here and now, to be a light to our neighbors, to be a light for ourselves. We are invited to see the light of God in the midst of the darkness which seems to surround us – a light of revelation for the salvation of the world.

We, you and I, are invited into the fulfilling of God's word, of God's blessing, of God's love for the world. We are invited to embody love, so that others may see in the story of

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God active in the world, themselves as well; not as mere bystanders, rather as active participants in the Kingdom of God come near.

The world now is too dangerous
and too beautiful for anything but love.
May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.
Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.
May your hands be so blessed
that everything you touch is a sacrament.
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.
May your feet be so blessed you run
to those who need you.
And may your heart be so opened,
so set on fire, that your love,
your love, changes everything.

(Benediction from: Blackrock Prayer Book a
prayerbook of the Episcopal tradition for use
at the Burning Man Festival)

May it be so. Amen.

Note on Luke 2:32 pulled from biblehub.com 29 January 2025:

****a light for revelation to the Gentiles**

This phrase highlights the universal scope of Jesus' mission. In the Old Testament, the Gentiles were often seen as outside the covenant community of Israel. However, prophecies such as Isaiah 42:6 and Isaiah 49:6 foretold that the Messiah would be a light to the nations, bringing salvation beyond Israel. The use of "light" symbolizes truth, guidance, and divine presence, indicating that Jesus would illuminate spiritual truths to those who were previously in darkness. This revelation to the Gentiles signifies the breaking down of barriers and the inclusion of all peoples in God's redemptive plan, as further emphasized in the New Testament through the ministry of the apostles, particularly Paul, who was known as the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13).

and for glory to Your people Israel.

This phrase underscores the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. The coming of the Messiah was the culmination of centuries of prophecy and expectation within the Jewish tradition. Jesus, as a descendant of David, fulfills the covenantal promises made to the patriarchs and the nation of Israel. The term "glory" here can be understood as the honor and exaltation that comes from being the chosen people through whom the Messiah would come. It also reflects the restoration and elevation of Israel's status in God's salvific history. This glory is not just nationalistic pride but a spiritual elevation, as Israel's role in God's plan is fully realized in the person of Jesus Christ. This is consistent with passages like Isaiah 60:1-3, which speak of Israel's light drawing nations to God.

First Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

This reading concludes a larger section (2:17—3:5) in which the prophet speaks of the coming of the God of justice. Malachi looks for that day when the wondrous power of God will purify the priestly descendants of Levi who minister in the temple at Jerusalem.

¹ See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³ he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Psalm: Psalm 84

How dear to me is your dwelling, O LORD. (Ps. 84:1)

Second Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18

Jesus shared human nature fully so that his death might be for all humans a liberation from slavery to death's power. Here the writer uses the image of priestly service in the temple as a way of describing the life and saving death of the Lord Jesus. He is the high priest who offers his life on behalf of his brothers and sisters.

¹⁴ Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, [Jesus] himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

This story is a study in contrasts: the infant Jesus with the aged prophets; the joy of birth with the ominous words of Simeon to Mary; the faithful fulfilling of the law with the presentation of the one who will release its hold over us. Through it all, we see the light of God's salvation revealed to the world.

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (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

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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.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.