

The Lord be with you:

**and also with you.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

as we gather we must recall the promises and warnings given to us in the Scriptures. Let us therefore examine ourselves and repent of our sins.

Father God, we confess that we often take the gifts of your creation for granted, and use them chiefly to further our own interests:

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Saviour Christ, we confess that we often give in to the selfish desires of our hearts, and the uncaring ways of the world.

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

Holy Spirit, we confess that we often close our minds to your influence, and fail to bear good fruits in our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

**Absolution** May God our Father forgive us our sins,  
and bring us to the fellowship of his table with his saints for ever. **Amen.**

**Malachi 3:1-5** [The Coming Messenger]

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. 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; 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. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

This is the word of the Lord;

**Thanks be to God.**

**Luke 2:22-40** [Jesus Is Presented in the Temple]

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 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

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. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 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, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

'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.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

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 for seven years after her marriage, 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. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him. This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **Sermon**

May the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable to you, Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Today is a busy day. Traditionally, tomorrow is, not that I buy it! the start of Spring here in Ireland. It is also the Feast of St. Brigid, the Abbess of Kildare in about 525 AD. Brigid is one of those crossover figures of the earliest expression of Irish Christianity. It is difficult to form a realistic picture of this woman who emerged from her pagan past to fly a vigorous flag for Christianity, just like Patrick did before her. Many of us have a physical representation of Brigid's time in our homes – a Brigid's Cross. Traditionally it was credited with saving us from fire in the home – many hang over an old range or cooker to this day. But do we know the provenance of this unique cross? I like the story of Brigid, as a nun, being called to minister to a dying pagan chieftain, who was raving in the delirium of sickness.

She sat down quietly by his bedside, picked up some of the rushes which they used to keep the floor clean, and began to plait them. Her hopes for his conversion seemed doubtful, but she consoled him as she weaved. The sick man asked what she was doing. She began to explain the cross, and as she talked, his delirium quietened and he questioned her with growing interest. Through her weaving, he converted and was baptized at the point of his death. Apocryphal though that may be, can I – can we – claim to have converted anyone by the force and certainty of our faith?

But today is, above all else in Christian tradition, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. And it is full of symbolism. Forty days ago we celebrated the birth of our Saviour. Today, on that last day of the Christmas season, we remember the day when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple. These were good believers: they brought this baby a good day's journey from Nazareth to follow the Law.

Why? And why did Luke find this so important that he wrote of it? It is all totally Jewish: They came to present Jesus in accordance with the law. This law came from Exodus, where we are told, “The Lord said to Moses: Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine.” Later, he was more specific: “every first-born male among your children you shall redeem.”

Israelite tradition continues from the time of Moses; in Leviticus it states: “the mother shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtle-dove. If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons”. Luke's account tells me that Mary and Joseph would not have been able to afford a lamb offering. They were not rich. I try to remember that - when I visit a sumptuously-decorated beautiful church or cathedral – that Jesus wasn't born into riches or privilege. But we know that, when we remember his birth in a stable rather than a palace.

The central theme of this reading, is also very Jewish. Two figures of the Temple identify this insignificant baby as the Messiah – the promised one of God. Simeon took the baby into his arms and praised God. “NOW” – now, he said: pointing to that moment when he received Jesus in his arms. He spoke directly to God: “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word.”

Simeon is one of those 'favoured by God' to whom the Messiah's birth brings peace. Remember what the angels said to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours.” Another thing, missed by many of us: Simeon's declaration of Jesus is as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” Jesus; glory is prepared in the presence of all peoples. That means all the people of the earth. Us!

Simeon's short speech is actually an overview of the entire story. At the level of human drama, this revelation about Jesus will not be obvious to all people, nor accepted by all. For some, Jesus will be a sign of contradiction and division within the people of Israel, so that some fall and some rise. Luke clearly shows the reader a divided people; some Jews will gladly receive this first visitation. Indeed, Simeon and Anna symbolise

precisely such a welcoming people of God. From such as these, Jesus will call together the authentic people of God, those who will “rise” within Israel. So today is a real time of change.

Change within the accepted understanding of the people of Israel, with some accepting and others rejecting the new revelation that was this baby – Jesus, the Son of God. Change within our season of the Christian year, as we finish the Christmas season. Change as we start a time of reflection and preparation for the other major festival time of the Christian year – Easter – with all its contradictions and challenges. I hope you will take time to think through what it is we actually believe; what our Bible tells us of the life-changing events and message of Easter.

Amen.

### **The Apostles’ Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

**Amen.**

### **Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the Presentation of Christ**

Almighty and everliving God, clothed in majesty,  
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the temple  
in the substance of our mortal nature:

May we be presented to you with pure and clean hearts,  
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

We give thanks for the knowledge of our salvation, seen with the eye not of sight but of faith; enlighten the Church to be a true Temple to the glory of Christ and a witness to the world. Lord, in your mercy, *hear our prayer*

Bring the divine light to shine on all nations. Through Christ who took our nature fully upon him, deliver your people from all evil. *hear our prayer*

In our families and friendships, make us a light to lighten the lives of others. We pray for all people who are sick or suffering, at home, in hospital, in intensive care units. As COVID-19 still constrains our freedoms and threatens our health and the lives of those around us, come with the healing power of your love to cleanse all that is not right in our community, that all may know their true Redeemer.

*hear our prayer*

Bless and protect the vulnerable ones of our common humanity; the babies; the parents who have few of the world’s goods; the aged and infirm. Be their strong defence in times of need and keep them from harm.

*hear our prayer*

We pray for those who have separated in peace and have come into the glorious light of eternity. Receive them into the salvation that was prepared for them from the beginning.

*hear our prayer*

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever, Amen.

**Dismissal:**

In darkness and in light,  
in trouble and in joy,  
help us, heavenly father,  
to trust your love,  
to serve your purpose,  
and to praise your name  
and the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**

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