

Christ is born! Alleluia! God was revealed to the shepherds, who made their pilgrimage to experience the birth of Christ and then they began telling others the good news. Mary and Joseph made their pilgrimage with the newborn Jesus to the temple to be presented to God, to be named, and to be circumcised. This was the Jewish custom on the 8th day after birth.

If the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem and childbirth weren't taxing enough, Mary made the five-mile journey to Jerusalem within a week of giving birth. Mary and Joseph took their faith seriously and were observant Jews. They honored their faith commitments and their parental responsibility. What they experienced at the temple further clarified for them that their son is the Son of God and the role he would play in the world.

We often think that babies are so small and helpless, yet they hold a sense of power. When people see a new baby, we gasp and coo and reduce ourselves to baby language. Even the strongest of men with calloused hands become gentle while holding a baby. New dads often clumsily hold their newborn until they learn the baby won't break. Babies hold a sense of power and mystery and awe over us.

That happened with Simeon. A frail, aged man, who was waiting his whole life for the Messiah. Once God revealed himself to Simeon, he took the child in his arms and cradled him with love and nurture. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon long ago that he would see the Messiah before he died. He waited and watched his whole life. Waiting for the Christ child became the yearning of his entire life.

And, one day, it happened. The Christ arrived. What Simeon eagerly anticipated, finally arrived, and he knew he could die in peace. He praised God and prophesied at the same time, saying, "I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (v.30-32). Simeon confirms that God is with us, as a light and as salvation to all people.

Simeon continues his prophesy to Mary: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many" (v. 34). Notice the arrangement of these two words: falling and rising. In our world, it's usually rising and falling. We see the rising and then falling of a celebrity, a business, or even an empire. Jesus from the very beginning reverses the natural order of things. With Christ, we experience rising only after falling. We rise with Christ after we have fallen or surrendered our own selfish desires.

Another prophet was in the temple that day. Anna, an elderly widow was worshipping God, "night and day" (v. 37). God revealed himself to her, and she began telling others of the good news of redemption. Notice the subtle reversal of night and day. We typically say all day and night to convey that someone does something constantly. Each new day is followed by a night. Anna is already part of the new order, that is coming with Christ. The reversal that will shake the foundations of those in power.

Simeon and Anna remind us that birth is both an ending and a beginning. Simeon and Anna, old and devout, embrace the new beginning of this newborn child. New beginnings are not just for the young.

Simeon and Anna waited a lifetime for this moment to find perfect peace, and they helped usher in this new beginning. God used them to assure Mary and Joseph and the whole world that this child is the one they've been waiting for, the one who has come to bring light and salvation to all people. Mary and Joseph are just beginning as new parents with a big responsibility, but God continued to be revealed to the people around them to assure them that God is with them.

The gospel according to Simeon and Anna is the same gospel that others have told. God was revealed to the shepherds, and they became the first messengers of the good news. The Holy Spirit revealed the divine to Simeon and Anna, so they would continue spreading the good news. Perhaps religious people might listen to them since they were devout in their faith. Perhaps people on the margins of society might listen to the shepherds. God continued to move people from all stations in life to tell the good news of Jesus Christ, the good news that is for all people.

As we move into the Christmas season, God continues to be with us. It was not just at one moment during the birth. Christ continues to be with us as we join others on our pilgrimage. God is with us in our falling and in our rising. God is with us in our nights and in our days. God is with us through all the messengers around us who are sent to assure us of this great light and salvation. God is with us in this birth, in the new beginning that is to come. Amen.