

The Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ
(Candlemas)

4:00 pm

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Mark Brown, *Honorary Assistant*
on
Haggai 2:1-9; John 2:18-22
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The Light Shines in the Temple

This beautiful service of the Blessing of Light and Evensong continues our celebration of one of the major feast days: the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. All our major holy days are rich with layers of meaning. But one thing in particular stands out for me just now—as we face the crises of the days ahead and the confusion and challenges they will bring. We can feel overwhelmed.

But in the midst of the complexity of all we're dealing with, there's a simple truth conveyed in this feast day. And it's this: The light of Christ shines in us, that it might shine forth from us. Christ is present to us and within us so that we might make him present to this world. Imperfect as we are, stumbling along the way, the light of Christ is meant to shine forth from us. After the destruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, the prophet Haggai spoke of a new Temple—which was built and it, too, was later destroyed. Jesus speaks of a new kind of temple: his body (which was “destroyed,” we could say, in the crucifixion—but “rebuilt” in a new way in the Resurrection).

St Paul speaks of the temple of our bodies. And of the Body of Christ—meaning all Christians. The Book of Revelation also speaks of this new Temple, a new tabernacle or dwelling place: the people of God. So many temples.

On the Feast of the Presentation we remember how Jesus was presented in the Temple in Jerusalem by his parents, along with sacrifices according to Jewish law. Oddly, Luke's telling of the story says little about the official presentation to the priests, but more about an apparently ordinary man named Simeon, who it seems, just happened to come into the Temple, guided by the Spirit. But Simeon, whoever he was, literally just in off the street, recognizes the infant Jesus for who he is: light! The light. The true light. Light for revelation, light for revelation to all people.

Our observance of this Feast Day began for many of us with a celebration of the Holy Eucharist earlier today—the Eucharist, Holy Communion, Mass, the Divine Liturgy—the Sunday morning service goes by different names. In that celebration Christ is present to us in the sacrament of the consecrated bread and wine: the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist, we could say, is Christ's presentation of himself to us in this temple.

But there's another presentation—the presentation of ourselves. We are present to Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. We even say so (paraphrasing St Paul), *“here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee...”* We then pray to be filled with God's grace and heavenly benediction and made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him.

He presents himself to us. We present ourselves to him—we lift up our hearts to the Lord. That he may dwell in us and we may dwell in him. The blaze of light and beauty that shines forth from his presence dwells in the temples of our own hearts. The source of all that is, the very source of light and life and love, the fount of all grace and truth is enshrined, enthroned in our own hearts.

The Christ light shines in the temples of our hearts—so that it might shine forth from us. He said once, *“I am the light of the world.”* On another occasion he said, *“You are the light of the world.”*

But the light doesn't shine only in ethereal realms, above the fray, above the tumult of human lives. In this world, the light shines most truly in concrete ways and forms—even in the midst of darkness and confusion. It shines in our loving service to one another. In simple acts of kindness and generosity and in the willingness to forgive. In our respect for the dignity of every human being. In the simple act of seeking and speaking truth. In speaking the truth in love. In speaking truth to power (as Jesus often did)—even as that becomes riskier by the day.

The light of Christ shines in justice and mercy—what he calls the *“weightier matters of the law”*. Justice for all, and mercy (always and everywhere)—especially to the most vulnerable and to those in our country who are afraid now.

On this Feast of the Presentation, Christ presents himself to us in the temples of our own hearts. And invites us to be present to him. It's our *“Here I am, Lord”* moment. Of course, any day can be our *“Here I am, Lord”* moment. Any time, any place.

Here we are, Lord. You are here for us; we are here for you. May the blazing beauty of your divine light shine forth from the temples of our hearts.
