

# Sermon for the Feast of the Purification of Mary and Presentation of Our Lord

*'For this child I have prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him.'*

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It is indeed the case that Holy Mary, and all her ancestors before her, prayed for this child, this only child, who would in some way, after some manner of speaking, be the *consolation of Israel*. She, like all her kinsmen, likely had very little idea of what the savior born to her would do, or in what way He would in fact *save his people from their sins*.

For the sayings of the prophets are great in number, and often unclear, or even contradictory; they speak of a *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*, yet also of a *suffering servant, even one who bears our stripes*. They foretell a prophet *greater than Moses*, and yet again, *one who is not a man, but a worm*. They reveal *one who is great, like a son of man, before the Ancient of Days*, but yet nothing, *a child, born of a virgin, even born of Bethlehem, the least of the rulers of Judah*.

Mary does not know how this son should be her savior, even as she knew *not how she would conceive, as she had not a man*. But this she perhaps understands, that in some way, upon her lap, enclosed in her arms, nursing at her breast, is one once hidden within her womb, yet one whom the whole creation cannot contain; for this is the Lord, the God of Abraham, for *His name shall be called Immanuel*.

It is in this God, that she hopes; and *for this child that she has prayed*.

Mary goes forth to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer the proper sacrifices according to Moses, to be made for the purification of a mother after birth, and to dedicate the first born which opens the womb, *for all the firstborn that open the womb shall be mine, sayeth the Lord*. Indeed, at this moment, the Lord God

dwells in His Temple, *made with hands*.

Now a righteous man, named Simeon, approaches the Holy Family, and seizing the infant Jesus from His mother's arms, he begins to praise God, singing '*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace, according to your word.*'

He seems to sing a song of great joy. Truly it is in great joy, even rapture, for he sings of his death.

Yet before we speak of this, let us understand what comes next first.

It is written that St. Simeon *blessed them, and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'*

If this indeed be a blessing, it is one that most mothers would rather do without, for most women would find it somewhat off putting if, while at the hospital, after having given birth, and holding a beautiful child, surrounded by flowers and tokens of love and support, they were to receive a bubbly Hallmark card which bouncily promises inside the rise and fall of nations, of opposition and offense and persecution, and bloody swords piercing her motherly heart. One might say, it does not suit the occasion.

And yet this, Simeon does say, even to the Blessed Virgin.

As Lutherans, we sometimes are not sure what to make of Mary. The Holy Gospel itself declares her to be *blessed among women*, and that *all generations shall call her blessed*. And indeed, we sing her praises and raise up her own hymn, the Magnificat, with regularity. Yet we balk at our friends from Rome, with their unbiblical doctrines of the sinlessness of Mary, of her having never died, being perfect, but rather having been assumed into heaven just like Christ; much more do we balk at the titles given her, as the Co-Redemptrix of mankind, and the Queen of Heaven; all things unknown to the Scriptures and to the ancient Fathers of the Church.

And yet, it cannot be denied that not only does Mary have a pivotal purpose in the great and glorious work of our Lord's salvation; it is clear that the Evangelists speak of her repeatedly, time and again, in a manner that few outside the

disciples Peter and John enjoy.

The reason is quite simple: Mary is the very image of the Church, for just as she is the fleshen vessel within which the incarnate Word of God is made manifest, so now does the Church everywhere bear the Word, bathed in it by the Sacraments, filled with it by the public readings, and *pondering it always in our hearts*, even as the Holy Virgin did.

Indeed, even as Mary bore the Word made flesh into the world, so every Sunday does the Liturgy bear the Word's very body and blood to us, that we may eat and drink, and be fed by our mother the Church, who bore us by her womb, the fount of the Sacrament of baptism, and will one day commend us into a grave, even as Mary prepared the body of her own son with aloes and spices for His rest in the tomb, until the time of His raising.

For this reason, Christ, as He speaks His last, commends St. John, the beloved disciple, to Mary, for He is entrusting His Gospel to the Church, and the Church to His Gospel.

It is for this reason that Mary will indeed *forever be called blessed*, for she is the very image and type of the Church, and of every Christian within it, all who are born of God, and who bear God within us.

If we understand this, we will understand the blessing of Simeon better, for we can now see that He does not speak simply of Mary the Mother of Jesus, but of the Church, the Mother of all the Saved.

For though it is indeed true that in bearing the Christ, the weak and oppressed would be raised, even as *the mighty are cast down from their thrones*, yet in the heart of the Christian, every moment is a falling and rising, a death and resurrection, as our old Adam is slain, and Christ is raised in us, even until the day when our bodies are glorified in Him.

And even as Christ shall be a *sign that is opposed, an offense and a stumbling block, foolishness to the Greek and a scandal to the Jew*; His cross, the sign given to Moses that should be established against the fiery serpents in the wilderness, shall be upon our forehead and upon our heart a sign that we are marked by Christ Crucified, that we may be His own, to be gathered back to Him who bore our sins on the Last Day. We ourselves are an offense to the world for the

foolishness that we profess, *yet it is written, 'the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of the wise,' and again, 'blessed is he who is not offended by me.'*

A sword shall indeed pierce the soul of Mary, the singular grief of a mother who must witness the untimely death of her son; yet to us all, the two-edged sword of the Word of God proceeds from the mouth of Christ, and pierces us through, purifying our hearts and minds as with fire, even the fire of the Holy Spirit, for it is written *'did not our hearts burn within us when he spoke with us on the way.'*

And the thoughts of many will be revealed; of those who are offended, their hatred of the Almighty will manifest itself continually, even in the mouths of those we love; but of those whom are offended by the shame of the cross, yet by the grace of faith given to believe, even before the tribunal, the judge, the lion, the firing squad, their confession shall be made, the true thought *of the heart of stone made flesh*, as it is written, *'the spirit from your Father will teach you what to say.'*

*'For unto us a child is born'* one who is *appointed for the fall and rise of man*, the one whose *blood shall make us free to be people of God*. This is Him now, in the arms of Mary, in the arms of Simeon, who seers of old time chanted of with one accord, the promise and its fulfillment, the suffering servant and the eternal king, the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days, *the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the fall and rising of all things, even the resurrection and the life, him who makes glad the hearts of men, that we may depart in peace.*

Never again allow young Mary alone cling to our God, nor aged Simeon take Jesus; join the Holy Mother Mary and become our Holy Mother, the Church; receive, and bear, and carry, and bless this Son, our God; and speak with the virgin and the old man the sigh of all who have tasted the grave before you:

*'For this child I have prayed.'*

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: 1 Samuel 1:21-28; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40.*