

SERMON for Sunday, February 2nd, 2025 at St. James Emily  
[Read Luke 2: 22-40]

As I read our Gospel story earlier in the week, I had a profound sense that our couple, Mary and Joseph, were filled with awe and wonder and a little bit of fear, perhaps even a sense of intimidation as they entered the temple in Jerusalem.

They have come from the north of Israel, from Galilee where life is a lot simpler and much less noisy! This is not the local synagogue – it's the great temple that's eight city blocks long! Here Mary and Joseph were very aware that they were peasants, far away from home.

They were here, probably with other parents, to do what was required of them, i.e. the formal presentation of their newborn son to a priest in the great temple, just as Jewish law demanded.

Back at the entrance, Joseph had purchased two inexpensive birds, as was demanded by the occasion – a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the birth of their son. Joseph may have resented the exorbitant cost of the birds, nevertheless he paid knowing that their gratitude and joy was beyond price!

Then, suddenly, two older adults who are watching the drama unfold for our couple, the priest, and the two small birds, step forward.

The old man, Simeon, was probably hiding behind a pillar. He walks slowly toward them as though he would speak to them, and he stretches out his arms toward Mary obviously wanting to hold the newborn Jesus. He looks trustworthy and so Mary surrenders her son and a remarkable change takes place on the countenance of Simeon.

His voice rises and he sings (I paraphrase here): “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen the salvation prepared for all people.... a light to all the nations....”

Mary receives the child back and then almost as an after-thought, Simeon says to her (and again I paraphrase), “you too will be pierced to the heart”.

All of this is both unexpected and terrifying. And just as Mary holds Jesus more tightly and Joseph guides them quickly to the exit, another figure appears out of the darkness of the Temple. Anna introduces herself. She is also full of joy and pointing to the infant Jesus, she suggests to all around that he will grow up to make a great contribution to the world!

This is an incredible story. In it Luke has given to us an extraordinary portrait of humanity!

Here is the full spectrum of humanity. At the centre, an infant, the baby Jesus. There is his very young mother, Mary, and beside her is Joseph, a decade or two older. And then there are the two very senior people – Simeon and Anna, and I see these two as faithful Temple volunteers. They are part of a workforce that make it possible for the Temple to continue to function.

I am reminded of all the churches I have served. Every one of them had the equivalent of a Simeon and an Anna. Seniors full of wisdom and life experience, encouraging the young, supporting the priest, reminding us of tradition and yet sparkling with excitement at every newcomer.

The scene painted by Luke is a microcosm of any community, and it gently reminds us that healthy communities encourage the full spectrum of life – from infancy to extreme old age.

I have one more reflection. Love is costly, and love can be very hard work.

There is, of course, the cost of carrying the child – from morning sickness to overwhelming tiredness. Then there is the panic of possibly making a mistake with one so dependent and vulnerable.

For parents, it is a series of joy and laughter, tears and raised voices, and yes, maybe even temper tantrums!

All of that is a cost.

Every human being who has read this episode in Luke's Gospel knows that all loving involves being “pierced to the heart”, or else love never really existed at all.

Parent and child, partner to partner, friend with friend. Simeon speaks to all of us!

This episode of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple provides us a few vivid pictures. Simeon and Anna look upon Jesus and see more than an infant; they are looking with wisdom and perceiving a future for Jesus which the young

parents cannot yet see. How often does a grandparent see what is not seen by the younger parent?

I rejoice at every teacher, coach and mentor who has seen the potential in a child and nurtured that potential. But I also see Mary and hear Simeon's wise words about the cost of love. I see Mary – our lady of sorrows – a living embodiment of the costliness of all loving. Thanks be to God!