

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him 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 favor of God was upon him.

Now that all our joyful ‘Hark the herald angel singing of Christ being born in Bethlehem!’ is over, and our soul’s ‘Silent Night’ of feeling its worth is over, the gospel writer Luke joins us with ‘Mary and Joseph in the raising of their baby. As devout Jews, they had already had him circumcised and named by their covenantal community of faith. And now, after the appropriate time has passed, they’ve come to the temple in Jerusalem for Mary’s purification and Jesus’ presentation as a firstborn male to be consecrated to God. Jerusalem and the temple are significant throughout Luke’s gospel, and it’s important to Luke that Jesus is seen as one who was raised in faithful observance of Jewish law. He makes that point in today’s reading; in fact, while Luke uses the word “law” nine times in his gospel, five of them are found in this passage. Jesus was raised in full obedience to the Law of Moses, within a religious tradition that praises and honors God in all of life, when you rise up and when you lie down, in your going out and your coming in, in the way you dress and what you eat. This ceremony of presentation expresses Mary and Joseph’s “deepest awarenesses and commitments. They saw God at work in events they had experienced. They lived within a covenant community and they sought to fulfill vows they had made as well as to introduce their son into that covenant community’ (taken from Culpepper, Sermon Seeds)

This season I’ve been reading the book, ‘All I Really Want’ by Rev. Quinn Caldwell. It’s a collection of daily devotionals and prayers for entering into the mystery of “God-with-us” in Christ Jesus. One thing that I like about this collection is that the advent devotionals do not end on December 25 with the church’s celebration of Jesus’ birth, but rather extend through the whole season of Christmastide (which ends on January 6 with the season of Epiphany). The thing that I liked about his Dec. 26<sup>th</sup> reflection is that it helped me better understand Luke’s Christmastide story in which we find two very old people of faith still waiting for God’s Promised One. Rev. Caldwell wrote: So? Did you get everything you want? Is there a check mark next to everything on your list? And are you totally fulfilled? Completely happy? Now let me ask a more important question: did you get everything you truly want? Not the stuff on the list you e-mailed to your aunt and uncle. I mean the stuff you want so bad it’s more like a need. Did your disease get cured? Did your

deceased loved one come back? Did you and your estranged brother finally work it out? Did your depression let you get out of bed and meant it? I really hope your answer's yes, but I fear it won't be. The commercials would have you believe Christmas is all about fulfillment: the gleam in her eyes when she opens the diamond necklace. And if at the end of Christmas, you don't feel completely fulfilled, it can seem like something went wrong. Sometimes the church does the same thing. We make it sound like all we're waiting for in Advent is the baby, and since God's promised to give him to us, just like a parent promising an Xbox, we'll be all set once Christmas morning comes. But Advent isn't just about fulfillment. Advent is always about longing, and it's always about longing that's not going to be fulfilled for a long time. Christmas didn't fix everything; it *started* fixing everything. Meanwhile, we continue to wait, with all the biggest items on our lists unchecked. And yet, after Christmas, after the baby, the tenor of our wait is different. Now, we're not waiting alone. Now, we're waiting with the God who could have remained above it all but chose to dive into it with us and not leave us until the end (p. 118-119)

Christmas didn't fix everything: it started fixing everything. If what he says is true, then what in Simeon's and Anna's story is the Incarnation faith's start of fixing things? In the story's claiming of me this year I have two thoughts to share. The first is that Sacred/Holy/Divine Light is a gift of God that graces every child born to humankind. That Original Blessing rather than original sin is our birth status. And because we so believe, "Namaste", honoring the Sacred Light in every soul we meet is a non-negotiable practice of our faith.

The second idea is specific to Christian thought. It's about disciples of Jesus recognizing the image of Christ within (Emmanuel and Israel's long awaited Messiah). Theologians Crossan/Borg explained: Simeon and Anna recognize that Jesus 'decisively reveals and incarnates the passion of God as disclosed in the Law and the Prophets—the promise and hope for a very different kind of world from the world of Pharaoh and Caesar, the world of domination and empire.' Whether we are Simeon and Anna long ago, or the people of God today, we recognize with our hearts, the one who reveals God's dream for just peace in this world.'



In the book 'Offerings' there's a picture of a child with an image of Buddha on his hat. The child is roaring. In Buddhist thinking, each person is capable of awakening to and developing the compassionate, non-violent sacred being within. And so for encouragement along this journey of spiritual development Jack Kornfeld wrote under the picture: **We need to make our lion's roar—to persevere with unshakable courage when faced with all manner of doubts and sorrows and fears—to declare our right to awaken.** After Simeon had blessed the Holy One he said to 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." According Rev. Fred Craddock the Christian teaching here is that: Jesus will bring truth to light and in so doing throw all who come in contact with him into a crisis of decision. In that decision, rising and falling, life and death, result. Jesus precipitates the centrally important movement of one's life, toward or away from God." To which Rev. Howell adds: "Notice the order. In the world, it's rise and fall. The rise and fall of the Third Reich, the rise and fall of the business tycoon, the rise and fall of a movie star. But with Jesus it's fall and rise . . . We fall, and from that lowest point, we rise."

**At that moment Anna came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem** (vs. 38). So, what do you think? Was her praise to awaken the Christ imago within? And were her teachings on Jesus as the Lord's Messiah the same ones that the church uses today for the Holy Spirit's breathing of courage into our hearts made for love?