

February 1, 2026

Presentation of Our Lord

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This morning we have deviated ever so slightly from the lectionary texts for today which would be the fourth Sunday in Epiphany to instead use the texts and imagery from a holiday that falls on February 2nd, tomorrow, which is the Presentation of our Lord

This festival celebrates two important rituals in the life of Jesus' Jewish family which was the purification sacrifices for Mary, forty days after giving birth to Jesus, and Jesus' presentation and dedication to God as a first born son – both of which are directives of laws in the Torah

What may have otherwise been a day filled with rather ordinary sacrifices and liturgical rites becomes a moment of great significance as an elderly man named Simeon, "righteous and devout" as Luke describes him, and a widow named Anna, also devout worshipping "there with fasting and prayer night and day," see the child Jesus and know he is the Messiah

It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah and he was guided by that same Spirit to come to the temple that day just as Mary and Joseph were bringing their son, Jesus, for the rituals of their tradition

In this beautiful moment of revelation, Luke says that Simeon "took [Jesus] 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.'"

A common canticle in our Evening Prayer services and known by its Latin title "Nunc dimittis" – which are the first words of the prayer "now let depart," this prayer from Simeon is Luke's version of the Epiphany

In Luke, it is not Magi from a foreign land who proclaim the manifestation of God in Jesus, it is an elderly, faithful man and an elderly, faithful woman.

Truly this is the son of God, the Messiah, now I may depart in peace because my eyes have seen him and he is a light to the nations

Poet and author, Jan Richardson, notes in one of her reflections on this festival that “Taking a cue from Simeon, some churches began, in time, to mark this day with a celebration of light: the Candle Mass, during which priests would bless the candles to be used in the year to come. Coinciding with the turn toward spring and lengthening of light in the Northern Hemisphere, Candlemas offers a liturgical celebration of the renewing of light and life that comes to us in the natural world at this time of year, as well as in the story of Jesus. As we emerge from the deep of winter, the feast reminds us of the perpetual presence of Christ our Light in every season.”¹

It may not seem like we are emerging from the deep of winter just yet, as Jan puts it, but believe it or not today is the midway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox

We are at a hinge point in our rotation around the sun just as Jesus’ coming into the world was a hinge point in the narrative of the salvation of God’s creation

We are emerging from the depths of winter literally

And, in a brief way this week, we are emerging from the depths of a metaphorical winter of despair and ICE

And, I wonder, as we emerge from the deep of winter, do we, like Simeon and Anna, perceive the perpetual presence of Christ our Light?

¹ <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2009/02/01/feast-of-the-presentationcandlemas-2/>

For Simeon and Anna, there was a deep knowing when they saw the young Jesus presented at the temple that this was indeed the manifestation of God in the flesh

That this baby who would grow to have a ministry of justice and peace, love and reconciliation, grace and mercy, was indeed the light, the revelation, the truth that all of creation longed for

The light of the world has come, Simeon sings, I have seen it!

As we emerge from the deep of winter, do we see the light of Christ? How would we know it if we did?

20th century mystic and theologian Howard Thurman, in a speech he gave at a graduation ceremony at Spelman College in 1980, proclaimed that “There is in every person, something that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine.”²

“And can you find a way to hear the sound of the genuine in yourself?” he asked the graduates.

“There are so many noises going on inside of you. So many echoes of all sorts. So much internalizing of the rumble and the traffic, the confusions, the disorders...that I wonder if you can get still enough-- not quite enough-- still enough to hear rumbling up from your unique and essential idiom, the sound of the genuine in you.”

“And if you cannot hear the sound of the genuine in you, you will, all of your life, spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls,” he warned.

So, “how does the sound of the genuine come through to you.”

² <https://thurman.pitts.emory.edu/items/show/838>

Being the deeply faithful man that he was, I can't help but think that "the genuine" is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit – the inspiration and wisdom of God, that which helps each of us connect to and believe in the the loving grace of God embodied in Jesus

In saying there is something in each of us that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine, Rev. Thurman is reminding us that there is something in each of us that longs to be in relationship to God and we long to hear the Spirit's guidance

He believed that if we are still enough – not quiet enough – still enough, we can hear the sound of the genuine, hear the rumblings of the Spirit, within us

So, how does the sound of the genuine come through to you – how is the light of Christ revealed to you?

In this sanctuary? In ritual? Like how the genuine in Jesus was revealed to Simeon and Anna

What about in stillness? In poetry? In study? Or maybe in action and engagement?

How does the sound of the genuine come through to you – how is the light of Christ revealed to you?

Whatever it is for you, "cultivate the discipline of listening to the sound of the genuine in yourself" Rev. Thurman says.

And he doesn't stop there: "Now there's something in everybody that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in other people."

We may all get to the point where we can say "I hear the sound of the genuine in myself."

“And having learned to listen to that,” Rev Thurman believes we “can become quiet enough, still enough, to hear the sound of the genuine” in others

Rev. Thurman concludes his speech to the graduates by saying: “There is in every person, that which waits, waits, waits, and listens for the sound of the genuine in [them]self. There is that in every person that waits, and waits, and listens for the sound of the genuine in other people. And when these two sounds come together, this is music God heard when [God] said, let us make [humankind] in our image.”

Rev. Thurman had a wonderful ability to speak and write in a way that was both poetic and somewhat abstract, but my take away and summary is this:

The sound of the genuine – the Holy Spirit, the light and truth of Christ that Simeon saw when Jesus came to the temple that day – is present in each of us

And Rev. Thurman reminds us that we yearn to hear the sound of the genuine in ourselves and we also yearn to hear the sound of the genuine in each other, for it’s only when these sounds come together that we recognize the harmony

As we emerge today from these weeks of winter which we have recently endured, and I mean both the literal winter and the dark days in our community and nation, I long to perceive the sound of the genuine in my own self and I yearn to hear it in those around me

and I think...I think I can hear the harmony

I am not convinced we are completely through the winter yet, but I do think we are seeing glimpses of hope that the seasons are turning

We are seeing glimpses of the light of Christ presenting themselves to us in the hearts, hands, and voices of God’s faithful people around us

At protests and vigils, in mutual aid and letters to politicians, in meals prepared and rides offered

Can you hear the harmony?

As we emerge from the deep of winter, can you perceive the perpetual presence of Christ our Light?

12th century Cistercian monk, Gueric of Igny, wrote “Behold then, the candle alight in Simeon's hands. You must light your own candles by enkindling them at his, those lamps which the Lord commanded you to bear in your hands. So come to him and be enlightened that you do not so much bear lamps as become them, shining within yourself and radiating light to your neighbors. May there be a lamp in your heart, in your hand and in your mouth: let the lamp in your heart shine for yourself, the lamp in your hand and mouth shine for your neighbors. The lamp in your heart is a reverence for God inspired by faith; the lamp in your hand is the example of a good life; and the lamp in your mouth are the words of consolation you speak.”³

As we encounter these dark days and consider emerging from winter, do not so much bear lamps as become them.

Listen for the sound of the genuine in you – your heart lamp – and seek the sound of the genuine in others – the glimpses of their hand and mouth lamps

What a glorious array of harmony and light that could emerge if we do!

Let us live into the wisdom of our great teachers, Simeon and Anna, Rev. Thurman , and Gueric of Igny, and kindle our flames, seek the genuine,

³ <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/christmas1bpresentation.html>

and let our hearts, voices, and hands glow with the wisdom and love of
God

Amen.