

Luke 2: 22-40. Malachi 3: 1-4

In Luke's gospel this morning Joseph and Mary come to present their baby boy in the temple at age 40 days, as prescribed in Leviticus, this was the ancient custom for all Jews. At the center of this passage is the baby Jesus Christ, revealed as the light of the world.

For so long, and through life's ups and downs, Simeon had held fast to the promises of God as told by the prophets such as Malachi. And now Simeon physically holds that dream come true – the baby Jesus Christ. And we hear those poignant words of Simeon.

Lord you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised

For these eyes have seen the savior who you have prepared for all the world to see.

A light to enlighten the nations,

And the glory of your people Israel.

Now Simeon holds the hope and promise of eternal life.

But this message is not just for Simeon but for all nations. All people. Holding that tiny baby in his arms- the light and hope for all people. "A light to enlighten the nations."

And then there's Anna. A widow who after being married for only 7 years, spends the rest of her life as a widow living in the temple. Though Anna must have known the deep grief of loss from her husband's death - And because there is no mention of her children coming to care for her as would be the ancient custom, Anna not only knew grief but loneliness. But Anna, like Simeon, is a holder of hope. Anna spends the rest of her days in prayer in the temple waiting with hope to see the messiah.

And then when Mary and Joseph arrive at the temple, Simeon explains to Mary, that the falling and rising that would define her son's life will pierce Mary's heart and soul.

But I think that Mary gives us the lesson of hope too this morning. Later, when Mary stood at the cross looking up at her son, though her pain had to be immense, she had to hold on to that same hope of Anna and Simeon. Mary must have realized that she had birthed a son who would become the light of the world and the flame of hope for eternal life for all the world to see.

This is what the high holy day of Candlemas is about. Belief that Christ came to us to be the light in our darkness and our hope in eternal life to come.

But I think the critical piece of this message is not just for Simeon, Anna and Mary but rather for all nations. All people. Holding that tiny baby in his arms- the light and hope for all people.

One of the many reflections shared in Her book: How we learn to be Brave- Bishop Budde confesses that the highest duty of preaching must be authenticity to the present context.

And so, if you might allow me to truthfully reflect as we all begin this week, , where will be our prayerful thoughts for our own lives and the lives of others need the light of Christ to shine in the darkness? I am weary and worried about this land; these changes that are being considered for those we care for in our community. Who will lose their job, who will stop coming to our food bank for fear of deportation, who will fear for their child who is struggling with gender identity, who will not receive our aid so graciously given in places in the world where famine and malaria snuff out the lives of the young.

But today we worship together on this high holy day Candlemas- celebrating the light of Christ who came to Simeon, came to Anna, birthed by Mary and comes to all of us in our darkness.

In these days how are we looking deeply to see the signs of God's Kingdom within us and around us – to be thankful and to treasure them as we shed the light of Christ and the hope of eternal life- for the families who lost their beloveds in the airplane crash on Thursday.

So what can you do? Mark this Candlemas Sunday in your home. Designate a candle, Light and pray for the blessing of God's eternal light on your home, for you, your family and your friends known and unknown here and around the world.

I was reading again "The Time is now" written by theologian Joan Chittister. And her words calling for spiritual prophecy in 2019, ring true for us today. Agree? It is simple and all we can do is Shine Jesus' light to the refugee, the sick who need our care, and give food to the weak and lonely.

You are Simeon, you are Anna, and you are Mary.

WE LIVE WITH THEIR HOPE that on this Candlemas Sunday we worship together holding the baby Jesus in our arms, holding on to the hope that Jesus's light gives us.

Lord you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised

For these eyes have seen the savior who you have prepared for all the world to see.

A light to enlighten the nations,

And the glory of your people Israel.

