

## **Presentation of Our Lord (Presentation of Jesus at the Temple)**

**Luke 2: 22-40**

**The Anointed**

**Rev. Sharon Smith**

It was a warm day in January (this was in South Africa!) and we gathered in an outdoor gazebo. My grandmother Moekie was there, my parents, my uncles and aunts. It was the day my brother, Andrew and sister in law Moira got married. And the reception was held in my parent's garden. The unique aspect of this celebration, was that their son, born in the preceding September was also christened that afternoon. There was a rightness to this day. The generations gathered to bless a new family.

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Something of the tenderness of that day strikes me as I read this account of Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the temple with Simeon and Anna.

Jesus born to a very young woman, in sketchy circumstances, in faith is brought to the temple in observance of the Jewish Law. His mother Mary is to sacrifice a dove for her ritual purification (a ritual health law) and Jesus was consecrated – presented to God as a first born – the one who opened Mary's womb, given to God.

And the generations gather around this young family – Simeon and Anna – the wisdom and expectancy of Israel personified.

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I am struck by the contradictions in the story. Not unlike the contradictions and contrasts of life. We rise, we fall. The same circumstance can invite some people's flourishing and others languishing.

Simeon announces that Jesus, this anointed One, will comfort or console the nations. And then in the next breath he utters bitter news to Mary. A sword will pierce her life. One of the many sorrows this Mother will endure.

Harsh news comes unexpectedly. And with the phone call, the letter, the visit, the email we are startled, shocked. It's like a promise turned on its head – a promise of pain, grief and turmoil.

These Simeon moments (as Joyce Rupp calls them) are a part of life and we cannot avoid them. And we cannot plan for the hurt that may await us in the future because of an unwanted pronouncement.

*Joyce Rupp in Your Sorrow in my Sorrow*

The wonder of this Lukan text is that just at that moment Anna moves toward the young family. Anna an elder, wise from enduring her own suffering, encounters Mary at a crucial time. Anna comes as a source of strength for Mary.

The Spirit moves people into our lives as we are in need.

*Luke Timothy Johnson – Commentary on Luke*

Spirituality author Anne Lamott says: People are assigned to each other. Just as with unexpected news, support is most often a surprising gift.

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One sacrament (the outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace) we have in our Church, is for times like these. Times of suffering, pain. Of hard news, of sorrow.

It is called unction – Holy Unction. The action of anointing someone with oil.

Anointing is one of the oldest “outward signs” of God’s inward presence and blessing. Unction involves anointing with oil blessed by the Bishop for the purpose. The sacred oils are consecrated (blessed) annually at a Cathedral Eucharist when diocesan clergy gather during Holy Week.

Unction, the anointing with sacred oil, is often misunderstood. Because it has been associated with “last rites,” death and dying, the Sacrament is viewed as spooky, morbid or somehow magical in nature. Unction is not holy insurance. Neither is it magical.

Rather, Unction is an affirmation and a sign (sacrament) of the presence of the Holy Spirit, alive within us, and giving us strength as we journey in our lives.

Holy Unction/anointing is used at a Baptism – [and today we will anoint Scarlett, daughter of Makayla and Conner, granddaughter of Sheila, Barbara and Patrick]

It is also used along life’s journey - the anointing of oil is an opportunity to celebrate, face life decisions, grieve, and realistically deal with mortality. We are never alone. God is with us. In Unction, we are marked once again, as in baptism, as Christ’s beloved forever.

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### **8am conclusion:**

Holy Unction is not required but it is an opportunity the church offers as an assistance for those in the midst of life – in all of its rising and falling – its ups and downs. Unction provides an assurance and confirmation of faith found no where else.

It is, like Simeon and Anna are, contrasts. When there is a difficult invitation, there is also comfort.

*As you are outwardly anointed with this holy oil,  
so may our heavenly Father grant you  
the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit.  
Of God’s great mercy,  
may God forgive you,  
release you from suffering,  
and restore you to wholeness and strength.  
May God preserve you in all goodness,  
and bring you to endless life;  
through Jesus the Christ our Lord. Amen*

## **10 am conclusion...**

Makayla, Conner and Scarlett, today together we bear witness to God's love for us, before we get to do anything.

Scarlett has begun her journey. And with each new day, with each new phase of her development. There will be both times for celebration and times of tears and sorrow.

And parallel to this, there will be times that you both will need sources of strength to walk with her.

Sitting with you are your parents, Scarlett's grandparents,

We need community. And that is what we are here for at St Catherine's. Friendships forged in the messiness and contradictions of life.

The times when we shake our heads and cannot trust God. And for the times when fear is settled by the peace of Christ in our midst.

Baptism is our beginning. It is our welcoming in. And all are welcome.

Welcomed into the beauty of intergenerational community.

In this place we are surrounded by the wisdom of Simeon and the comfort of Anna.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.