

BIBLE STUDY
January 27, 2020

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Malachi 3: 1-4

Luke 2: 22-40

Hebrews 2: 14-18

1. Malachi 3: 1-4

- One of the Minor Prophets and the last book in the Old Testament. Malachi (which means messenger) gives a warning to the people who are a few generations after the exiles who returned to from Babylon. His message is that God has loved Israel but they have not loved him in return. They have not given him proper worship by withholding tithes and offering the second best of their flocks and harvests. The priests have grown lax and have not admonished the people. They have an attitude that serving God and obeying his commandments amount to nothing and do not matter. Those who do evil prosper and are better off. God condemns this attitude and behavior and warns of a day of reckoning that will come.
- V1: The messenger is John the Baptist who prepared the way of the Lord. There is discussion whether the Lord who comes is also John or the Messiah. In its use for the feast of the Presentation it seems likely that it is the Messiah, Jesus, who will come to his temple and pronounce judgement. There is some ambiguity when later in the verse the Lord seems to be identified with the messenger of the covenant.
- V2: Who will be able to survive the coming of the Lord? Like Psalm 130: If you, O Lord, mark iniquity, Lord, who can stand? The image of the Lord who comes is very similar to the picture that John the Baptist preached.
- V3: The Messiah will come to purify the people as metal is purified by fire or a wool maker cleanses with lye. Once purified, they will be able to offer worthy sacrifices to the Lord.

2. Luke 2: 22-40

- **The Presentation of the Lord; Simeon and Ana**
- **Biblical background:**
 - **Leviticus 12: 2-8:** After giving birth, a woman is ritually unclean until she offers a sacrifice after 40 days. If she cannot afford a lamb, she offers two turtledoves or two pigeons. Mary and Joseph offered the latter, revealing their simple lifestyle.
 - **Exodus 13: 2, 12:** the dedication of the first born
 - **1 Samuel 1-2:** The story of Hannah and the birth of Samuel is a pattern for the story of the presentation of Jesus. Hannah presents the boy Samuel to Eli at the temple at Shiloh where the boy will remain and be raised by Eli, dedicated to the service of the Lord.
- **Imbedded in the story are many of Luke's themes**

- **Jerusalem:** Jerusalem is very important to Luke. It is from there that the Good News goes forth, showing continuity with Israel. From the center of Judaism comes for the Good news of the New Israel. In Mt. and Mk. the Risen Lord Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee; in Lk and Jn, it is in Jerusalem.
- **Righteousness:** Mary and Joseph are presented as pious and devout. They observe the Law and are righteous—in a right relationship with God by observing the Law—just as were Elizabeth and Zachariah.
- **Dual Witness: Man and Woman:** Women have a special dignity and respect in Luke's Gospel. He often presents a dual witness of a man and a woman., e.g. Zechariah and Elizabeth, the widow of Zarephath and Naaman, the healing of the demoniac and Peter's mother-in-law, the centurion of Capernaum and the widow of Nain, Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Simeon ("God has heard") and Ana ("Grace and Favor") represent the best of Old Testament spirituality. They obey the Law, are devoted to the Temple, and await the coming of the Messiah and salvation.
- **Fulfillment:** When Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple, all the prophecies of the Lord entering his temple in glory are fulfilled. The prophecy of Malachi: "And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek" is fulfilled. The theme of fulfillment is key to the first chapters of Luke. The birth of Jesus (and his ministry, death and resurrection) is the fulfillment of the hopes and yearnings of Israel.
- **Faith to Recognize Jesus:** In Jesus, God is in the midst of his people. Simeon recognized the presence of the Lord through the Holy Spirit. This will be a continuing theme in Luke—to be able to recognize Jesus as Son of God and respond with faith.
- **Universal Salvation:** In his canticle—the Nunc Dimitis—Simeon bears witness to the universal goal of Jesus' mission. He is bringing salvation not only to Israel but to the whole world. He is the glory of Israel and also the light of revelation to the Gentiles. In the gospel and in Acts, Luke stresses the universal mission of Jesus. From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.
- **Reversal:** Simeon prophesizes that Jesus will bring about a great reversal (the first shall be last and the last first, rich will become poor and the poor will become rich, etc.) "The child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel."
- **A Choice to Be Made:** A sign that will be contradicted: a person of great holiness who is rejected. Jesus will force people to show their real colors and play their cards. He will be a foil to reveal what is in the hearts of human beings. Throughout the Gospel, people will have to decide for or against Jesus.
- **A Disciple Will Suffer with Jesus:** A sword will pierce Mary's heart. She will suffer because of the treatment of her son and

people's reaction to him. She will stand at the foot of the cross and see him die. She represents the cost of discipleship. Disciples must be ready to suffer as did Jesus. "Deny self; take up your cross, and follow me."

- **Preach the Good News:** Ana also represents the best of Israel. Widows had God's special care and protection. She lived a contemplative life in the temple of constant prayer and fasting. She too recognized the presence of the Lord in her midst and told everyone who was living in expectation and hope about him. She was preaching the Gospel—evangelization.

3. Hebrews 2: 14-18

- V. 14: Jesus is truly human like us. Jesus shared in our humanity, our blood and flesh. Jesus saved us by undergoing death as we did but since he was more powerful than death—more powerful than the devil that was thought to have brought death into the world and was in charge of death—he defeated death by giving us eternal life beyond death.
- V. 15: The fear of death, i.e. the fear of our relationship with God ending at death, kept human beings subjugated throughout their lives.
- V. 16: Angels do not have flesh and blood so Jesus did not come to save them but us—the descendants of Abraham.
- V. 17: Therefore, he had to share totally in our humanity so that he could understand our situation because of his experience of it. By his experience of our situation, he could be a merciful and faithful high priest. He was one like us but also more than us as High Priest who could save us from our sins.
- V. 18: Since Jesus himself knows what it means to be tested; he can help us who are also being tested. He has solidarity with us.