



## Living On Tiptoes

*A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Claire Nevin-Field*

*The Presentation of Our Lord.(Candlemas) ~ February 02, 2020*

### Malachi 3:1-4

AN ORACLE.† THE WORD OF YHWH TO ISRAEL through Malachi. I have loved you, says YHWH. But you ask, “How have you shown your love?” Esau and Jacob were brothers, weren’t they? replies YHWH. Yet I loved Jacob, but hated Esau.I have reduced Esau’s hill country to a waste, and their ancestral land to desert pastures. Whenever Edom says, “We are beaten down, but let us rebuild our ruined homes,” YHWH Omnipotent replies, If they rebuild, I will tear them down! They will be called “Country of Evildoers” and “The People of YHWH’s Anger.”

### Psalm 24:7-10

7 Lift up your heads, O gates;  
lift them high, O everlasting doors, \*  
and the One who reigns in glory shall come in.

8 “Who is this who reigns in glory?” \*  
“The Holy One, strong and mighty,  
the Holy One, mighty in battle.”

9 Lift up your heads, O gates;  
lift them high, O everlasting doors, \*  
and the One who reigns in glory shall come in.

10 “Who is this who reigns in glory?” \*  
“This is God, the God of Hosts, who reigns in glory.”

### Hebrews 2:14-18

Since the children of God are flesh and blood, Jesus likewise partook of that flesh and blood, that by dying he might render powerless the one who has the power of death—that is, the Devil—and free those whose fear of death had enslaved them all their lives. Surely Jesus came to help not angels but rather the children of Sarah and Abraham! Therefore, Jesus had to become like his sisters and brothers in every way, in order to be a merciful and faithful high priest on our behalf, to make atonement for the sins of the people. And since Jesus suffered while being tempted, he is able to help others who are being tempted.

### Luke 2:22-40

When the day came for them to be purified, as laid down by the Law of Moses, the couple took Jesus up to Jerusalem and presented him to God. For it’s written in the Law of our God, “Every firstborn heir is to be consecrated to God.” They likewise came to offer in sacrifice “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accord with the dictate of the Law of our God. Now there lived in Jerusalem a man named Simeon. He was devout and just, anticipating the consolation of Israel, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. She had revealed to Simeon that he wouldn’t see death until he had seen the Messiah of God. Prompted by her, Simeon came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child to perform the customary rituals of the Law, he took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, “Now, O God, you can dismiss your servant in peace, just as you promised; 30 because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the peoples to see—a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.” As the child’s mother and father stood there marveling at the things that were being said, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, the mother, “This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that is rejected, so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare. And a sword will pierce your heart as well.” There was a woman named Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, who was also a prophet. She had lived a long life, seven years with her husband, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple, worshiping day and night, fasting and praying. Coming up at that moment, she gave thanks to God and talked about the child to all who anticipated the deliverance of Jerusalem. When the couple had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the Law of God, they returned to Galilee and their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew in size and strength. He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was with him.

Waiting, patience, is something we, as a culture, seem to struggle with. Our lives are increasingly built around instant gratification and we glorify efficiency. We can get answers to any question within seconds, meals delivered within minutes of ordering them, and groceries delivered within hours. I struggle with waiting for a package to arrive from Amazon for Pete's sake—2 day delivery now seems slow and I search for items that have same-day delivery. It seems we have a collective dislike for waiting—perhaps because, despite all our efforts, we actually spend a lot of time doing it. Waiting to be born, waiting to finish school, waiting for the right job, waiting for a life partner—we spend much of our lives on tiptoe, peering over the fence into the future with hope and longing. And, worrying that we are never actually going to “get there”, worrying that our waiting might have been for naught, we easily become dispirited, tired, frustrated—fill in the emotion. We feel that all this waiting should have some sort of payoff, but we worry whether or not it will. We look around at a world that seems not to be waiting at all but rather hurtling towards a frightening future over which we have no control. And those of us who follow Christ start to wonder where exactly God is in all of this, wonder why we are doing so much waiting and if our hope has been misplaced.

Today we observe what is called the Feast of the Presentation—the day when in ancient Jewish tradition, new mothers (not parents as Luke records) were required to go to the Temple to be purified 40 days after the birth of a male child and 60 days after the birth of a female child, and male babies were to be dedicated to God. And so in this morning's Gospel, we have some Lukan creativity along with serious liturgical chronological whiplash. Jesus, who just last week was roaming the beaches of Galilee calling disciples, is now a 40 day old baby, being taken to the Temple in this story that is part midrash and part time-travel. It's clear that Luke, a gentile, while perhaps not knowing the Jewish traditions around birth really well, knew enough about Jewish prophecy to place this story firmly within the tradition of the prophets who wrote of God coming to God's Temple. Now who knows what Malachi meant when he wrote about the Lord suddenly coming to his Temple, but I am guessing he did not have in mind a helpless little baby dragged along to his mother's purification by his travel weary parents—exhausted from a lack of sleep. That is just not a very impressive way to reveal that you are God in skin. It is a way that the vast majority of people, going about their lives, doing business in the outer courts of the Temple, waiting for their Amazon package to show up, or attending to religious ritual within, simply would not notice.

Except for Simeon and Anna. Two people who were old enough to be Jesus' Grandparents—people whose entire lives had been spent hanging around the Temple, standing on tiptoe, looking and waiting for God's promise of a Messiah to be fulfilled. And they had done all of this, presumably, without any of the obvious divine intrusions from which other biblical figures benefited: no burning bush, no angel clearing its throat and saying “umm, yeah, you are going to have a baby”, no skies parting and angels serenading them. All they had was their sure and certain hope in the promise of God. Their complete confidence that God would be faithful in fulfilling the promise and that they would see it in their lifetime. And so they had been looking for peace and believing God's promise that it would come. They had been hoping and trusting God's promise of new life, of wholeness, of salvation, trusting God's mercy—and they had spent their lives waiting for it to be revealed. Waiting and watching with the eyes and ears of faith and the discernment of their hearts. And, armed with just that, they took one look at these bedraggled parents and month and a half old baby and deep in their bones they knew. They knew what they were looking at—the fulfillment of all their hopes. The One they had spent their entire lives waiting for. God in flesh and bone.

This sort of faithful patience and keen insight is astounding to me. How did they know? I'm no expert, but I would hazard a guess that they knew exactly because they had spent a lifetime watching and waiting for God, honing their skills at seeing God in all sorts of unlikely people and places. Spent a lifetime worshiping in the Temple—grounding themselves in the rhythm of services and prayers. Spent a lifetime knowing, knowing, that God would and does show up in unexpected ways. Their countless years of waiting and watching in hope were not wasted but instead were years infused and transformed by the promise itself. So perhaps part of what this story tells us is that is not a foolish waste of time to order our lives according to a promise, to a story that is not yet complete. Perhaps living according to the promise of God locates us exactly where we are most likely to encounter the One who is life, freedom, and fulfillment.

The partner to waiting is hope—something with which we also struggle. We tend to think of hope as a sort of cross your fingers and hope for the best thing. And that sort of hope seems...foolish...misguided at best. It certainly does not seem like a good way to order your life.. But Christian hope is not about wishing something were so. It is about trusting deep in our bones, that, despite a world that often seems to have gone mad, God is trustworthy and God is with us, working to transform the world into a reflection of God's dream. Christian hope does not deny that the world is filled with pain and tragedy, not to mention the mundane stuff of life that takes so

much of our time and attention, Christian hope says yes AND. Yes life is at times painful and challenging, yes the world is filled with divisions, with people living in poverty, with racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, yes all of this is true. And yet more true is God's promise and God's presence. Christian hope is acknowledging that the story is not yet complete, and we may not live to see it, but that the end of the story has been written and it ends in God and God's love.

It is a stance to the world and a pattern for life. It sustains us through times of pain and suffering, times of confusion, times of not knowing, of frustration, of waiting far longer than we would like for God's hand to be shown.

Simeon and Anna remind us that we can endure a lifetime of watching, waiting, and hoping, And they remind us that God still intervenes in the common, the ordinary, and the small—in places and people we too often dismiss or look past or take little notice of. We need the eyes and faith of Simeon and Anna on days when the tragedy and strife of the world loom large, or when the mundaneness of life seems to take us over. Days when we struggle with faith, with others. We need the eyes and faith of Simeon and Anna in our common life together at St. Peter's. The patient and faithful waiting, grounded in sure and certain hope that God is working among us and within us—pushing and pulling us forward into God's dream for us.

My prayer for us individually and for us as a community is that we continue to stand on tiptoe, looking for God in our midst. That we encourage each other when we get tired or dispirited. That we look and listen for the Annas and Simeons in our midst. That we know deep in our bones that God is with us and that God's promise never fails. Then with Anna and Simeon, may we raise our voices in song—telling all the world what we have seen and known—inviting them to stand on tiptoe with us and proclaim, “my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all the world to see a light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.”

Amen.