

St Stephen's, 28 January 2018.

The Presentation of Christ, Hebrews 2, 14-end: Luke2, 22-40.

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The reading from Hebrews emphasises that Jesus shared our humanity. Jesus was born to suffer and to die for us. He shared our flesh and blood so that through his suffering and death, 'He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.' At Christmas we said, 'For to us a child is born.' When a child is born there are expectations and hopes for the child as it grows. For a first born son in the Jewish faith, there was a special requirement. Following the birth of a first born son, a Jewish mother had to wait 40 days, then go to the Temple to offer sacrifice for her purification and to present her son to the Lord. In Leviticus the required sacrifice was a dove and a lamb, but if the person was too poor to sacrifice a lamb, two doves could be offered instead. The presentation of the first born son was to dedicate that child to serve God. Jesus served God perfectly throughout his life. By his death he became the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

The Prophet Anna spoke about Jesus but we don't have the details of what she said. Simeon prophesied about him saying that Jesus was destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that would be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. This rising and falling is the consequence of how people respond to Jesus. Those who speak against him will fall ever deeper into the consequences of their sin and those who put their faith in him will be raised up to new life in Christ. Simeon's prophecy to Mary was, 'And a sword will pierce your own soul too.' Mary, the mother of the Lord, would suffer by seeing her son, Jesus, go through his passion and death for the forgiveness of our sins.

When Jesus was born he would have been held in the arms of Mary and Joseph. Joseph would've put Jesus on his knees smiled at him and took delight in him. Now about six weeks old Jesus is lifted up by Simeon. He recognises the potential for this child. That small bundle one day would show his eternal glory which makes the burdens of this world fall into insignificance. Joseph, Mary, Anna and Simeon would've had Jesus in front of them gazing at him and marvelling at what he would become. In a sense they should be our example. We should do what they did. We should constantly gaze upon Jesus to see clearly the pains that the Lord endured for us. Then we will willingly bear our own pains through his help. We heard in Hebrews,

'Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.' Disciples of Jesus, like the Lord himself, are dedicated to the service of God. The Christian life is one of great joy but also of sacrificial love. We face many trials and challenges. Let us hold before us not only the baby Jesus but the child who grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him. Today let us present ourselves afresh to God and be confident that the favour of God will be upon us.

Amen.