

BE REDEDICATED TO THE LORD

A sermon for Sunday, December 31, 2017, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba
THE FIRST SUNDAY IN CHRISTMAS

Gospel: **Luke 2:22-40** *Jesus is Presented in the Temple*

“²²When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’, ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons.’

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*²⁹‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

*³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.’*

³³The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.”

Blessed be the Lord our God for bringing us to the end of the year 2017 and to the verge, the beginning of 2018. It is God’s will that we reach the new year. Now that we have reached this present ‘*perfection*’ in the Lord, we press on so that we may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also prepared for us.

Friends, whatever we may have gone through this year, it is God’s will for us to see tomorrow full of hope and bright expectations.

Since the day each one of us was baptized, we (or our parents) dedicated us to God through Jesus. To dedicate is to commit or devote oneself to a special task - to have a single-minded loyalty. In this case, loyalty to God.

As a baby, Jesus was twice brought to the Temple:

- 1) after the eight days were completed for His circumcision and
- 2) after forty days to dedicate Jesus to God as it was written in the Law - ‘every male that opens his mother’s womb shall be consecrated to the Lord.’

When I was a doctoral student, in Chicago, in 1999, we went to area churches to see the functioning of a mega-church. I had already been many years a minister, since my ordination in 1986. The church I attended had perhaps 30,000 members. That was a **mega**-church and unlike anything I had ever experienced. I attended on a day of dedication of children (something new to me). That day, there were 100 fathers dedicating their children to the church.

Seven deacons were there to administer the dedication rites. Each baby was given a taste of three items representing three different sides to the church. First a taste of honey (symbolizing **the promise**, as in the 'land of milk and honey'). The babies seemed to like that taste. Second taste, just the tiniest pinch of salt (symbolizing their **apartness from the world**, as in 'you are to be 'the salt of the earth'', 'a city set on a hill'). And finally, a taste of bitter herbs (symbolizing that **life will not always be easy**). The babies did not like that taste at all, some cried.

After this dedication and after going through years of Sunday school and instruction, these children will choose for themselves whether to be baptized and rededicated at the age of 14.

This was obviously different from our infant baptism. But this process emphasizes the importance of family in dedicating children to God. The importance of family is also emphasized and must be stated regarding Mary and Joseph. They were a functional family, a holy family - exemplary to us, members of the church.

The Church is also a family, a faith family. It is the family of God and Jesus is the head of the family. Our human family is:

where we discover:

what it means to be human;

what our weaknesses are ... and our strengths;

where we experience love and forgiveness;

where we learn:

about relationships, unity, and sacrifice;

about loving others ... and accepting others;

values and attitudes;

trust and how to handle stress;

how to be responsible.

In other words, family is where we learn to get along with one another. It is just so in our faith family. The **success of society depends on the healthy family.**

Mary and Joseph were a *healthy* family though not a *wealthy* family. Mary and Joseph gave the smallest sacrifice that only poor families could offer - two turtle doves or two pigeons. It doesn't matter how much we have (or don't have). God does not demand what we cannot afford to give.

Not only were Mary and Joseph dedicated but also they obeyed the Law of God by presenting Jesus in the Temple. It is important that parents are examples to their children. Integrity starts at home.

Jesus was received by Simeon, a man filled by the Holy Spirit, a righteous and devout man. Seeing the baby Jesus, and receiving Him as a legal member of Abraham's family at His dedication, Simeon blessed God. Simeon states that in the child Jesus, he has seen God's promised salvation. He proclaimed Jesus 'a light for all the nations' including you and me. Simeon lifted the baby in his arms and sang a praise to God that we now call the *Nunc Dimitus* (Luke 2: 29-32).

We, too, sing this Canticle at the end of the Communion service and at Compline (evening prayer) as our own reminder of our **rededication** to God. You may ask why we begin each worship service with confession and forgiveness. It is an act of rededication, a re-commitment of oneself and a single-minded loyalty to this special task - to come to worship our Lord.

The meaning of the name Simeon is "*SIGN*." It is my father's name, too. Simeon also prophesied how Jesus sacrifice would be like a 'sword that will pierce His mother's heart.' Once we behold Jesus we behold salvation which is the meaning of *HIS* name. When we behold Jesus we behold the consolation of Israel. When we behold Jesus, we see His Light, His Revelation which He reveals to all Gentiles. With Jesus in our lives, our lives are blessed. Our salvation is complete. For Christ is our all in all!

All that we need as families and as individuals is to **dedicate our lives** to Him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all we can ever plan or think. In Jesus birth and in Jesus cross we see redemption - we see salvation. At the name of Jesus, every knee should bend and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord

Amen!