



We should note here how thoroughly Jewish all this is. There was a time when Christians scarcely realized that Jesus was a Jew. Because of that, it is all the more important, that we recognize how thoroughly and faithfully Jewish he was — how he was born into, and raised by, a devout Jewish couple. Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna — they are all the epitome of faithful Jews. St. Luke wants us to see that Jesus is no interloper; he emerges from the very heart of Jewish history, Jewish tradition, Jewish life. Indeed, St. Luke is telling us that both the Law — signified by Mary and Joseph who faithfully observe the Law, and the Prophets — signified by Simeon and Anna who are both prophets — both the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in Jesus.

Mary and Joseph are too poor to bring a lamb, so they have presented their two pigeons. The old man, Simeon, takes the baby in his arms, and opens his mouth to say, “It is he! I have been waiting all my life to see him!”

*Lord, now let your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.*

Anna arrives a moment later, we are told: “*And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*”

Simeon and Anna then, are models for us. Simeon knows by the power of the Spirit that, at the end of life, the one thing that counts is this meeting with Christ the Lord. Now he can die in peace, according to the Lord’s promise. He has fulfilled his watch. He has kept the faith. He has hailed the Messiah.

Anna has never ceased throughout decades of widowhood to keep hope alive. Now that she has received her heart’s desire she immediately responds by doing two things: by praising God, and by telling others about him.

“Epiphany” means “manifestation” or “revealing” — the manifestation of Christ to the world — the revealing of the good news of Jesus to all people. At this time of year, Anna is an especially good model for us. You and I too, are called to respond to God’s revelation by praising him, and by telling others. Like Anna, we are to be thanking God, and then speaking of Jesus to all who will listen.

The Epiphany season then, is a happy and joyful time in the church year. **But** Lent is right around the corner, and today’s Gospel gives us hints of Lent even in the midst of joy. After his beautiful *Nunc Dimittis*, Simeon has something more to say, something a bit disturbing. Simeon tells Mary:

*Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel,  
and for a sign that is spoken against —  
and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.*

Even in the overwhelmingly joyful moment of revelation, the shadow of the cross is already present. This Messiah is not like Alexander the Great, or Napoleon, or General Petraus. This is a man, who, for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem thirty-three years later, will come riding humbly, not on a mighty war-horse, but on a donkey. This is a man who will stand with his hands bound before the Roman governor, and who will refuse even to defend himself. This is a man who will be nailed naked to a cross by the roadside, for all to see and ridicule.

In today's Gospel, this Jesus is but yet a child — but he is hardly safe and harmless. *“This child is set for the falling and the rising of many.”* This child provokes a crisis, a decision, for Simeon, for Anna, a turning point for ***all people***, of every generation. This child is set for the fall and rise of many.

And notice the order of the words. In the world, it's “rise and fall.” The rise and fall of the Third Reich, the rise and fall of the business tycoon, the rise and fall of a celebrity. But with Jesus, it's “fall and rise.” Fall first, then rise. As in, *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* (Jn 12:24).

Jesus suffered and died, ***and then*** was raised to glory. Likewise the Christian disciple suffers and dies — and not just at the end of life. St. Paul writes: *“I have been crucified with Christ”* (Gal. 2:19). I bear the death of Christ in my own body ***now***. I deny myself. I am persecuted because I am in sync with Christ Jesus, and out of sync with the world.

We fall, and from that lowest point, we rise. In holy baptism we are buried with Christ in his death. We fall deep with him in the waters. And then we rise up with him in newness of life. We rise up, joined to his resurrection.

May that ever be the pattern of our life. And like Anna, may we always praise and thank God, and tell others about him.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

