

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation, in which we commemorate the presentation of Jesus and the purification of Mary in the Jerusalem Temple forty days after Jesus' birth, in accordance with the requirements of Jewish law. This feast came to be called by the shorter and more beautiful name of Candlemas because it celebrates the day an old man took the baby in his arms and recognized him as 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' Welcome words of promise fulfilled in those difficult times. Over time, it became the custom of the church to bless all the 'lights' or candles in the church, praying that all who saw that outward and visible light would remember and be blessed by the inner light of Christ who enlightens us all.

From the prophet Malachi, we heard that it had always been prophesied that "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple." Candlemas is the day we celebrate that, in the Christ child, eternity has indeed come into time. And that through him, God appears at last in his temple, not as a mighty warrior or a powerful king, but as a vulnerable pilgrim, coming in love to walk the path of life alongside us. We rejoice and take comfort in the revelation of this light, holding the experience close to our hearts as we navigate the troubled waters of our current times.

Mary and Joseph fulfill the law by traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem to present their first-born son to the Lord and for Mary's post-birth purification. In the Temple, they encounter a very old and pious man, Simeon. Sometime before, the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before seeing the long-expected Messiah. So, Simeon spent his days at the Temple, searching for this sign of the redemption of Israel. At long last, when Simeon saw the infant Jesus, he took him in his arms, blessed God, and sang out his joy for he had encountered the light of the world. The consolation of Israel had come.

Simeon's song of glory, praise, and thanksgiving have been prayed by followers of Jesus for two millennia. There are numerous translations, but the one that most resonates with me (and that you might find most familiar) is slightly different than the one in our gospel lesson and comes from the Daily Office in our prayer book:

*Lord, you now have set your servant free *
to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, *
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A Light to enlighten the nations, *
and the glory of your people Israel.*

The Song of Simeon, also known in Latin as the Nunc dimittis, is most often sung or said in the Anglican service of Evening Prayer. But it is also foundational to Compline, which is my favorite liturgy from the Daily Office.

Compline is the last of the four offices and is prayed at the end of the day before sleep. While my persistent sin of impatience often gets in the way of my faithful observance of all the daily offices, I am most faithful in praying Compline. I feel such comfort in the words of that short prayer liturgy. No matter how my day has gone... no matter how crazy the world around me... no matter my fears or my sorrows, I never fail to find deep solace in this prayer. I am reminded that the Light of Christ has already broken into this world and by this light, I can see that God is at work renewing and redeeming his creation.

Interestingly, I find the inverse to also be true. When my day has gone really well – when I think I am on top of the world and that all the good things in my life I achieved entirely based on my awesomeness – I find the act of praying Compline rights that ship as well. By the end of my prayers,

I recover thankfulness for all my blessings received and a renewed sense of awe of the providence of God for someone so fallible and insignificant as me.

It is remarkable how a short 3-minute liturgy can be so impactful, grounding me in God and turning my attention away from self and toward the light of Christ. And the very heart of the Compline liturgy is Simeon's song. Every time I get to that part, I tear up a little at these beautiful words. For reasons I do not understand, they touch some deep part of my spirit.

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These words are a sacred signpost, pointing beyond themselves to some eternal truth. Somehow, this song joyfully blurted out in exultation by an old man over 2,000 years ago provides a healing salve for my aching soul. And it is here, more than any other part of scripture or liturgy, that I most profoundly connect with God and find solace, assurance, and gratitude.

It is only one month into 2025, and I am shaken by all that has been going on. The horrendous fires in California, the terrible aircraft collision, and the intense volatility of our federal government have disrupted our lives, dominated our attention, and destabilized our well-being. I have found it hard work to manage my emotions and find my spiritual footing. And I suspect I am not the only one who has been feeling this way.

So, I want to make a suggestion. This week, I invite you to try praying Compline each night before sleep. Pray it aloud, even if you are praying by yourself. The prayers are lyrical and hearing them adds additional texture. The liturgy is short and takes very little time or effort. If you don't have a prayer book, you may take one from the pew back in front of you. If you prefer digital presentation, you can find it all online and I have a list of digital resources in the narthex for you.

Try this. See if it helps ground you. I have no answers to much of what is happening in the world around us. I have no control over them and no expertise to even weigh in. I do know, however, about the consolation that can be found in God and in the remarkable solace that can be found in prayer. Prayer in community is especially healing, so I invite you also to join us at our weekly Contemplative Evening Compline service here on Wednesdays at 5:30p.

Compline helps me. It helps me to pause my anxious mental spinning and to return to God, the ground of my being. Compline reminds me, as found in the words of the psalmist, "from whence cometh my help? My help cometh even from the LORD, who hath made heaven and earth." I think you might find that Compline helps you, as well.

May the Holy Spirit rest on us, as it did on Simeon, and may we have the same faith and the fortitude to watch and wait, searching for the promised light that marks God's presence and salvation.

Amen.