

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE

Malachi 3: 1 - 4

Hebrews 2: 14 -18

Luke 2: 22 - 40

“Darkness was over the surface of the deep and God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” Gen. 1: 2 - 3

Those lines from Genesis tell us that God created light; He's the source of all light, and yet it's one of His gifts we take so much for granted. We only realise how important it is when we're left in the dark.

And there are all sorts of darkness. The fear children have of being left in the dark is one. The fear adults have of being excluded from things, of being left in the dark in that sense, is another.

Both of those fears show that what we fear most is being all-alone.

But these external fears mask the underlying fear of living without God, and that's a terrible darkness.

Even more so when we don't want to accept that this is what's at the root of all our fears. The deepest darkness is inside each of us. It's the darkness of sin that affects, and infects us, every moment of every day.

Sometimes it can become so much a part of us that we don't even recognise that the darkness within is something evil.

It's also very easy to point the finger at other people or countries, and say they're evil. Indeed, that phrase used by President Bush, “The axis of evil” in his State Of The Union Address on January 29 2002, has come to mean countries and regimes being wholly and totally evil.

Let's be very clear about this: evil exists in our world. But it's not the result of upbringing or genetics. It stems from the Original Sin of humankind.

The fault-line in each of us that says, “I know better than God so I'll do it my way, not His.”

And the darkness of sin has its source in the rebellion of the Evil One, Satan, against the good God.

Some may say that's just a way of explaining for the simple-minded the enigma of evil and suffering.

Well I don't mind admitting in that case that I'm simple-minded.

And Jesus must have been as well because He knew that evil was a reality, embodied in Satan.

Each one of us has to admit to our part in shaping the evil we find in our world. To take responsibility and admit, that like ripples on the surface of still water, our individual sin has an affect on the whole world.

Each of our sins is the sum of the whole. But please don't despair or fall into the merry-go-round ride of guilt, which makes us think, “I'm too bad for God to forgive.”

Wherever there's darkness in you, Jesus Christ is ready to bring light and life to chase away the darkness that enshrouds us.

Several hundred years before Jesus was born the Prophet Malachi made a promise: “Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.” Mal. 3: 1

That promise came true when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple 40 days after His birth to give Him to the Lord God, to serve Him all the days of His life.

The Messiah had come to His Father's home, but in an entirely unexpected way; being carried as a helpless child who was dependant on a human father and mother.

And it had to be this way if God was to deal with sin, and this is what the old man Simeon could see immediately because: “The Holy Spirit was upon him.” Lk. 2: 25

Old Simeon had lived his life in the joyful hope of seeing the Saviour in the flesh, but fully realising the cost to God.

He knew that if God was to save us, somehow God must confront the worst about us, the terrible things we do to one another, the terrible things we do to ourselves.

That confrontation wouldn't come cheaply. Salvation would be a costly thing. There would be no such thing as cheap grace.

This baby in Mary's arms would grow up, would speak the truth to us, and would die for us.

The Cross casts its shadow across the manger. There's a close connection between Christmas and Good Friday.

The death of Jesus, which seemed to be the moment when darkness had overcome the light, is in fact the brightest light imaginable.

John explains it this way: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never extinguished it." Jn. 1: 5

Through the darkness of His death Jesus gives us eternal life with Him because of the light of His Resurrection.

And this mirrors perfectly what Simeon said of this 5 week old baby:

"My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel." Lk. 2: 31 - 32

This child in his arms would light up the whole world: and having seen and held the Light of the world he could now depart this world in peace.

Then after Simeon had blessed Mary and Joseph, he turned to Mary and told her: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Lk. 2: 35

The bright light of Christ casts deep shadows. As many people would rejoice to know Jesus the Christ, many more would reject Him.

His very presence would force people to choose whether they really wanted to get close to God the Father through Him or not.

The Saviour brought the light into the darkness of the world, and Satan tried to extinguish it through the death of the Saviour.

All of that will be the sword that pierces Mary's soul to the marrow.

Listen to these words spoken to Nicodemus when he came to Jesus under the cover of darkness. And having listened, then decide if you want to follow Jesus, the Light of the World, or retreat into darkness again:

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what they have done has been done through God."

Jn. 3: 20 - 21