



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4797 Curtis Blvd Port St John FL 32927

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple February 2, 2025

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“Lord, lettest now thy servant depart in peace, according to the Word, for my eyes have seen thy Salvation, which though has prepared before all people, to be a Light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the Glory of thy people Israel.”

It was the tradition Jewish women to do a purification and blessing of women 40 days after the successful birth of a child. The purpose was to give thanksgiving for a successful birth, but also to give thanksgiving for the safety of the mother.

That tradition might seem strange to our modern world, where almost every birth is completed successfully, both bringing the baby into the world and doing so in a manner that preserves the health and well-being of the mother. In first century Jerusalem, a successful birth was not something to be taken for granted. They did have good medicine, for their time, but infant mortality and mortality of mothers who encountered difficulty in childbirth were not a guarantee. In fact, in Scripture, we have two notable incidents of mothers who died in childbirth.

The first was the wife of Phineas, who was the son of Eli, the prophet and high priest.

Israel had been in a state of idol worship, adopting the Philistine Gods and abandoning worship of the one true God. Eli did not abandon God, but he did allow his two sons to live adulterous lives and to become a scandal to the priesthood. As a consequence, Eli was advised, though a dream given to the young prophet Samuel, whom he was mentoring, that Israel would be punished, and he would personally be punished for not reprimanding his sons.

Israel went into battle with the Philistines, and the battle was going badly. They decided they would bring the Ark of the Covenant into the field of battle so that God would defend them. Eli's two sons accompanied the Ark, two disgraced and scandalous priests presuming that they could call on God for a miracle. However, God abandoned Israel, as Israel had abandoned Him. Phineas and his brother were killed, and the Ark was captured by the Philistines. When Eli heard the news, he fell and broke his neck and died. His daughter in law, the wife of Phineas, went into labor, and though she delivered the child, she died shortly after naming the child Ichabod, meaning abandoned of the Lord.

The other example comes from Jacob, the father of the 12 sons that became the 12

tribes of Israel. Of those 12, the 2 youngest were born to him by his truly beloved wife Rachel. The oldest was Joseph, who had the multi-colored coat and was betrayed and sold into slavery in Egypt. Ultimately, he became the advisor to Pharaoh and saved his brothers during the famine that threatened to destroy the family. His younger brother was Benjamin, and Rachel, his mother, also died in as she delivered him.

We can see that Israel had good reason, both medically and historically, to show their gratitude and relief to God when a child was successfully delivered and the mother was preserved. In fact, the Presentation of Women after childbirth became a mandatory ritual under Mosaic Law. Joseph and Mary must have been relieved and grateful to receive that blessing after Jesus had been delivered under such unusual and dangerous circumstances. The Anglican Church has also imitated that practice as holy and appropriate. In our Prayer Books, on page 305, is the English derivation of that Temple service, known as the Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth, or also the Churching of Women.

As Mary was being presented at the temple for the Purification ritual, the Holy couple were accompanied by their new born Son. They encountered an aged, devout and holy man, Simeon, who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw the birth of the Messiah and the salvation of Israel. When he encountered Mary and Joseph, he took the Baby Jesus into his arms, and uttered the prayer of Thanksgiving, which is known as the Nunc Dimittis. We also repeat that prayer every day in our Evening Prayer. The verse from the Gospel selected for meditation in this Sermon are the words Simeon spoke as he held Baby Jesus.

The verse spoken by Simeon was prophetic and it foreshadows the command we receive from Jesus in St. Matthew v:16, a familiar verse which you hear from me almost every Sunday. "So let your light so shine before men that they see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven."

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen