

SERMON 912

February 1, 2015

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

983rd Week as Priest

810th Week at St Dunstan's

75th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

RAISING A HOLY CHILD

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Today we celebrate the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It's the story of Joseph and Mary taking a six-week-old baby to Jerusalem from their home in Nazareth—a distance of 90 miles—in order to present him to the priests there.

According to MapQuest, that would take about an hour and 45 minutes, but not so in first century Palestine. And if you are traveling with a new mother and baby, the preparation would be major, and the progress would be slow—you might be able to cover 10 miles a day.

Just imagine the dedication of this little family, that they would make several long trips like this—from Nazareth to Bethlehem and return; and two trips from Nazareth to

Jerusalem and back. All in the space of a few weeks, and that doesn't even count Matthew's story of their flight into Egypt!

We know they had a donkey, because we've seen the pictures, but he was transportation only for Mary and the Holy Child. Joseph walked the whole way, and since there were few roads, the travel was for the most part in wilderness. They carried their food and slept out under the stars, and yet they did everything expected of them under the Law of Moses.

I'm thinking that this brief description might be helpful in persuading young families to come to church. I know that it takes about 30 minutes to get the baby ready for a trip, but church is only minutes away. They have plenty of supplies in the SUV, not to mention air-conditioning and a Garmin—so they won't get lost or be uncomfortable. And there are plenty of people—like Simeon and Anna—who are eager to hold the baby, and change the baby, and feed the baby. So coming to church every Sunday is nothing compared to what Joseph and Mary had to do.

Of course, going to church once or twice a week is only a small part of raising a child. Imagine the weight on Joseph's shoulders as he thought about what Simeon said that day ...

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.

His son would be the savior of the world. His son would be light and glory. He would be like a rock star. He would be like Kate and William's baby boy. But more: He would be the Son of God.

We all want the best for our children (and grandchildren). We want them to be healthy, and happy, and smart, and good-looking. We want them to excel in school and sports. We want them to grow up to be good people. We want them to win scholarships and marry the person of their dreams and live happily ever after. But life isn't always that way. Life can be hard, and harsh, and no matter what you do, you can't prevent sorrow and tragedy and accidents and evil.

Joseph wasn't that different from you and me and any other father who has ever lived. He wanted the best for his boy. He wanted him to be successful. He wanted Jesus to live a long and amazing life. But things didn't work out that way.

Then Anna, the old woman who never left the Temple, came to them and prophesied that the Child would be the redemption of Jerusalem. She told everyone about the boy

Jesus. Imagine how his mother Mary must have felt. She had been overwhelmed from the very beginning, when the angel appeared to her and told her that she would conceive a child out of marriage. The travel, the stress, the danger, the duties of raising that little boy—they were all too much at times. And even now, when they were obeying the Law, doing their duty to God, the old man Simeon warned them ...

This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

This is not what you would want to hear about your own baby, is it? It was a warning, an admonition, that your child would be opposed by many of your own people, and that he might even die a violent death.

No, Mary, like any good mother, like you, only wanted Jesus to be able to grow up and become the man that God intended him to be. Mary wanted her boy to have a chance in life, to make something of himself. She wanted him to be healthy and happy and safe and secure. That didn't seem too much to ask.

But things didn't work out that way. Even though he grew and became strong, and filled with wisdom, and the

favor of God was upon him—even so, he was not spared the very worst that the world had to offer.

He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was wounded for our transgressions, oppressed and afflicted, and put to death as a common criminal. There is not a mother, not a father in this world, who would want such a thing for their son.

Do you pray for your children and grandchildren like I do? Do you ask God to protect them from danger and shield them from suffering? I do, with all my heart. Day after day, night after night.

Well perhaps, just perhaps, we should be praying a different prayer. Perhaps we should ask God to use them for his purposes and for his glory. Maybe we should ask the Lord to find in our children and grandchildren something that they can do for the Kingdom, some way that they can live for and serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That is truly presenting your child in the Temple. That is surely a sacrifice altogether pleasing to God. **AMEN.**