

Epiphany: Wk 4

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[0:00] Lord Christ, speak to us and through us thy mighty word, O Lord, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated. Well, as I mentioned, Caleb is getting a well-deserved rest, and since Mary and I showed up this week, I'm filling in.

As you're aware, we've been living in Virginia for the last half a year or so, and I was serving as an interim rector of a church there, Emanuel Church in Woodbridge, Virginia, and they're on the cusp of calling a new rector probably tomorrow night, so they're quite excited.

Well, today, in the church year, is a special day. February 2nd, every year, is the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

Now, we don't always celebrate that day because February 2nd is not on Sunday every year. I figured that out. You might say, I know a few things because I've seen a few things.

[1:14] So, when it is February 2nd on a Sunday, that's what we celebrate rather than the fourth Sunday of Epiphany. It's a special day.

Now, a lot of us remember the presentation of Christ in the Temple because we grew up praying the Rosary. Fourth decade of the joyful mysteries.

We've meditated on this, which reminds me of the Pope. So, the Pope was in his office and representatives came to see him.

They were from Chick-fil-A. And they said, so you've heard this joke, pretend you never heard it.

They said to the Pope, Holy Father, we would like you to do a favor for us.

He said, what would that be? And they said, would you do an encyclical that says, from now on, instead of saying, give us this day our daily bread, we will say, give us this day our daily chicken.

[2:16] And the Pope said, get out of my office. Well, Chick-fil-A is a good organization and they know how to get things done. They came back a week later. And they said, Holy Father, you didn't quite hear us.

What we would like to do, if you would change the wording to give us this day our daily chicken, we will make a contribution of six billion dollars. And the Pope said, let me think about that.

And so, the next day, he met with his cardinals and he said, we've got a big deal here. We've got some good news and some bad news. Well, what's the good news?

We are going to change the words to the Lord's Prayer to give us this day our daily chicken. And the cardinal said, are you crazy? He said, and not only that, but Chick-fil-A would like to donate six billion dollars.

And they all said, what a wonderful idea. But what's the bad news? He said, the bad news is we may lose the Wonder Bread account. Okay.

[3:25] But actually, the Pope is changing the Lord's Prayer. Did you read about this? This is serious here. He felt that lead us not into temptation.

Looks like God is leading us along. So, he's changing the words to do not let us fall into temptation. Well, I don't know.

Anyway, I don't think we're going to make the change. But all over the Catholic Church in some time, they will be saying the Lord's Prayer differently than we do. I don't understand that.

But I do understand the presentation of the Lord in the temple. And we're going to talk about that a little bit today by going through the Scripture passage from Luke 2.

It's a three-act play. One, they bring Jesus to the temple, his parents, so they can do the ritual. Two, Simeon shows up and makes a prophecy.

[4:27] Three, Anna shows up and makes a prophecy. Those are the three acts to the play. Let's talk about each one. So, it says, Now, there's a lot in that little passage.

Now, there's a lot in that little passage.

First of all, Jesus was 40 days old. That's what Leviticus said for a male. When you brought a female, it was different numbers.

Why was this called purification? I don't know. It's something to do with blood. And I don't go near blood. You know, they also have this thing after the birth of a child in modern society.

There are things that are naughty to do. It's got to do with blood. I don't know. But in this particular context, they were following the ritual, following the law.

[5:42] They brought Jesus to the temple. Presumably, they were living in Bethlehem at the time. And they brought Jesus to the temple for the purification rite.

They presented Jesus, the baby. Symbolic of the fact that God was going to present his son as the Messiah at some point.

So there's symbolism here. There's mystery. But they bring him. And the ritual goes on. It also says they offered some turtle doves or pigeons.

That meant they were poverty stricken. This was a couple who was just starting out. They had zilch money. How many of you started marriage that way?

Yeah. Right. Okay. So they couldn't bring a lamb. They didn't have the money for that. So they sort of are in solidarity with those of us in this room.

[6:44] They were not millionaires. They were not wealthy. They brought what they could afford. That's what God asks us to bring, doesn't he? Bring our lives what we can afford to the Lord.

They brought him. The ritual went on. Now, ritual is a thing that Anglicans love. I've noticed that. Now, ritual can be dead.

And ritual can be alive. For Mary and Joseph, we have to presume that ritual was alive. Whereas for maybe, I want to be judgmental regarding the priest, it could have been dead.

How often does a priest celebrate the communion? A lot. Does it ever just get to be ritual? Sometimes.

How often do you come to church and you just sort of go through the deal? And the real reason you've come to church is to get support from brothers and sisters in the Lord.

[7:54] Yeah, that's just the way it is. We're called to do both. We come to church to get support from family.

We mainly come to church to be in awe at this God who cares for us. They brought Jesus. Now, that would have been the end.

They came. They did their thing. They went back. But a couple of interesting things happened. One was Simeon. Okay, what does it say about Simeon?

Now, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, the saving of Israel.

And the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

[8:53] Special man. Like any man in this church. Special man. The Holy Spirit was upon him.

Which meant he had a sense of walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Doing the next thing the Holy Spirit asked him to do. Have you ever heard that happen?

I want to tell you a funny story, which is true. When I was made a bishop back in 2000, I was awarded a ring that was like an 18th century ring.

Was worth a lot of money. Problem was, the stone kept cracking and I was going bankrupt buying stones to replace it. So I said to the Lord, I can't keep doing this.

This is not good stewardship. What do you think I ought to do? And, okay, get in the car. So I drove down the road. And I said, okay, Lord, I'm expecting you to deal with me as you would.

[9:58] In the Spirit. Left turn. Walmart parking lot. Lord, are you sure there's a jewelry store to the right?

Walk into Walmart. The jewelry counter used to be right there in the front door when you went into a Walmart.

Okay, I walked to the jewelry counter. There in the counter, in the little locked up thing, was this ring. Simple cross on it.

And I said, Lord, that is the most unpretentious ring in the history of the world. Okay. Can I take a look at that ring? She opens the thing, gives it to me.

Fits right on my finger. I said, how much is this ring? She said, \$74. Now, I was in the Spirit.

[11:07] Now, that big old ring that's worth gazillions sits in... I'm not going to tell you where it is because you'll come steal it. Following the Spirit, sometimes funny things happen.

Simeon followed the Spirit. He went right into the temple, right where the priests were doing their thing of sacrificing, and he picked up Jesus.

He did that in the power of the Holy Spirit. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do to him according to the custom of the law, he took Jesus in his arms and blessed God and said...

Joseph and Mary did not know Simeon. So some strange man comes and picks up your child? I don't know.

I'd be a little concerned. In the power of the Spirit, they were not. And Simeon had a prophecy. The prophecy was, This is the Messiah.

[12:19] The Anointed One. I've been waiting all my life to see Him. In fact, God told me I would not die until I had seen the Messiah. Wonderful.

And then he said, you know, the good news, bad news? The bad news, he said to Mary, A sword's going to pierce your heart. Another name for Mary is Mother of Sorrows.

She is a mother that watched her son die. A mother of sorrows. With the good, there's a price.

The price actually was not just for Mary, but for all of us as we come to grips with who we are and our dilemma. That's Act Two.

Act Three is Anna. Older lady. Older and holy lady. She had been a widow until she was 84.

[13:24] As a widow until she was 84. She's rather old. She did not depart the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

A lot of us know older ladies. They seem to have this gift of holiness. They seem to have found time to spend with the Lord.

God loves old ladies. God loves old ladies. They often are prophets without realizing it. They prophesy of goodness and holiness.

And she came also waiting for the Messiah. And it said she spoke to others who were also waiting for the Messiah.

And they take Jesus back over wherever it was. Luke doesn't bother to talk about Egypt and all that stuff.

[14:35] They had them back to Nazareth. All right, that's the story. Now the colic is interesting. I just have to find it.

The colic puts this whole presentation thing into context. Listen to what we prayed. It says, We humbly pray that as your only begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in the substance of our flesh, so we may be presented to you pure and clean.

By Jesus Christ our Lord. Okay. Do you think you can get your way to holiness and goodness and heaven on your own?

Anybody think about that? We really try. We can't get pure and holy. I tried. I tried. God knows this. And that's why Jesus was presented as an infant. To let us know that his presentation allows our presentation in heaven.

[15:50] If you remember that Indiana Jones movie where you run along and then all of a sudden there's a cliff and you can't get to the other side?

That's kind of our dilemma. This is sometimes in evangelical circles called the bridge illustration. We're on this side of the chasm.

God's on that side of the chasm. We want to get to heaven. We take a lot of energy and we run across and we land in the chasm.

Sometimes the energy is religion. We're religious. We go for ritual. And ritual is going to land us in the chasm.

So we try something else. Nice. We'll be nice. We get up the nice energy and we run and we land in the chasm. How many times have we said Uncle Jethro was a nice guy.

[16:55] He didn't believe in God but he was so nice. Nice gets you in the chasm. Sometimes we want to get there by generosity.

We give our gazillions and we run and we land in the chasm. We can't get across to God. And so God fells a tree.

Boom! The tree is the cross of Christ. We can get across on the cross. The cross of Christ allows us to get there.

We don't have to worry about going to hell. We don't have to worry about towing the line. The tree is there for us to cross.

And that's where we get to the bottom line for us today. Today's feast day is a good day to do away with ritual for ritual's sake and take ritual for God's sake.

[18:05] Repenting across the bridge led by Jesus, falling into the arms of the Father, pure and forgiven. A whole lot happened this week, didn't it?

We had a flu outbreak which scares everybody. We've had impeachment hoopla, will it ever get over? We've got the Church of England bishops saying marriage is supposed to be between a man and a woman.

And then the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York apologizing for the statement of the bishops. We've got... Is there a game today?

I don't know. Anyway, a lot of things happening. The fact is, however, it all depends on the bridge for you and me. Are you on the bridge?

Are you looking for the bridge? Are you falling off the cliff because of defiance?

[19:13] Or are you across the bridge? The bridge is a gift of God for you. Let us pray. Lord God, we really would like to do it ourselves.

We know that's doomed to failure. We know that you presented your Son in the temple so that we might be presented holy and pure.

We thank you for this gift. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Let us confess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed.

We believe in one God, the Father, and the Almighty, and the maker of heaven and earth, of all of all that is, the biblical and invisible.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, eternally begotten the Father.

[20:31] God from God, light from light, true God, only God. Begotten, not made, upon being with the Father.

Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake, He was crucified under conscious fire. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, He rose again, and according to the Scriptures, He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory, and judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken to the prophets.

We believe in one holy Catholic in our solid Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

[22:00] Amen. Amen. Let us either kneel or sit for the prayers. On page 4 of the Liberty Booker.

Let us pray for the Church and the world, saying, do our prayers. After each topic, I'm going to pause, and that's a time for you to offer either aloud or silently a prayer to the Lord along the lines of a particular topic.

For the peace of the whole world, and for the well-being and unity of the people of God. Amen.

Amen. Amen. God, we pray for your church everywhere, especially, Lord.

Advent, may you come to know. God, we pray for your church in China, as an awful few of you have to pray. happens. I pray, Lord, that your people there would be spared and that they would be able to proclaim their gospel even in the midst of hard times there. Amen.

Lord, in your mercy, we are our prayer. We pray for Foley, our archbishops, Julian and David, our bishops, Caleb and Mark, our clergy, and to the people of our diocese and this congregation.

[24:01] Lord, we pray for all clergy that you would give them strength and wisdom, wisdom to deal with the many circumstances and outbreaks and things that are brought before them and the strength in your spirit to always carry on and so do you.

And we pray for the wonderful people of this parish, Lord. Bless each one in their ministry. In our diocesan site, post prayer, remember the venerable Mark Stone and one of the new congregations joined the diocesan in Ohio.

We ask that we would be a blessing to them. We pray for Father Caleb and his struggle with his rheumatoid arthritis. We pray, Lord, that you can set your healing hand on him and you could fully restore him.

We're standing to the parish of the Lord again. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. For all those who proclaim the gospel at home and abroad and for all who teach and disciple others.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

[25:34] For our brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted for their faith. Father, we especially bring before you Christians in Nigeria who almost every day another story comes out about how some were killed and kidnapped, tortured for their faith in the elsewhere.

I pray for those Christians in Nigeria. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For our nation, for those in authority, and for all in public service. Father, we pray especially for here in New York, the governor and the legislature, especially if they come into session and have before them many bills which are not favorable to human beings.

I pray, Lord, that you would work powerfully somehow in this difficult political environment. As well as in our nation's capital with all that's going on there, Lord, that justice and truth might be the order of the day again.

Amen. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

[27:30] For all those who are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. Father, we pray especially for him as she recovers from the eye surgery in Philadelphia with Jack with her.

I pray that you would set your healing hand on her and you would completely restore her vision.

Father, I pray for my wife's grandfather as it appears he's entering in the last days of his life.

I ask him to bring him comfort that he would claim the certain promise of your son on the cross.

Amen. I pray for your father, saying, healing, healing, and of...

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. For all those who have departed this life in the certain hope of the resurrection, in thanksgiving, let us pray.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Heavenly Father, grant these our prayers for Jesus Christ's sake, our holy mediator and advocate, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

[29:04] Amen. Let us humbly confess our sins, Almighty God. We are the Lord.

Most merciful God, we confess that he has sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole hearts. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us, that you may delight in your will and walk in your ways for the glory of your name.

Amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who in his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all those who sincerely repent and with true faith turn to him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[30:32] Amen. Hear the word of God to all who truly turn to him. If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Please stand. The peace of the Lord be always with you. And also with you. Please share a sign of that peace. I can fix it.

I can just...