

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our gospel reading today features two of the oldest characters in the Christian scriptures. We're told Anna is 84. We're not told Simeon's age, but we can presume he was old because he was facing his own mortality and we're told he'd have been for a long time waiting in the temple to see the Messiah.

Simeon and Anna both meet the baby Jesus when Mary and Joseph, his parents, bring him to the temple into Jerusalem to do the required religious acts.

The fact that Simeon and Anna were older just about gives me license to share with you the Senility Prayer, which I learned recently. Some of you are familiar with the Serenity Prayer. This is not that. Goes like this. "God, grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, and the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference."

I'm not sure about Simeon and Anna's eyesight, but they certainly saw the difference that Jesus made. Simeon said of Jesus, "This is a light for the Gentiles." And it's that emphasis on light which gives rise to this feast of Candlemas, which we're celebrating today, which is why the service is a bit different. In the days before electricity, when candles were the only source of light in a church building, it became customary to do as we did earlier and to set aside today to bless the candles in the church that gave light to the church.

And Candlemas is a feast day that comes halfway between Christmas and Easter. And it's a link between the two. It has characteristics of both. It's a story about the baby Jesus, but as we'll see, it looks forward to the events of Easter.

And Candlemas, for a reason I'll explain later, is an occasion which has a particular resonance for me personally. Of course, it's not only Simeon who recognized Jesus as the light. The Gospel of John begins with these words, "The true light which enlightens everyone is coming into the world." And

then later on, Jesus himself identified himself as the light of the world.

So, Simeon is seeing something very important in the baby Jesus. As he held him in his arms, he recognized him as the true light. And let me say a couple of things about light, why it's important. Firstly, light reveals. We all know how horrible it is to be in a room with the lights off, and you're fumbling around and you're not quite sure where you are. It's disorientating and unsettling. We can't see the way forward.

I heard a story once about a pilot who was trying to land at an airfield out in the boondocks, and she was flying about up in the air and she realized that they'd all gone home. It was a very small airstrip. There was nobody there, and all the lights were off. So, she knew the airstrip was there but couldn't land the plane. And as she went round and round, she was grateful that one of the neighbors obviously realized what was going on and drove their car onto the airstrip and parked at the end of the runway and turned the headlights on. So, the pilot was able to fly around to see the car with the headlights illuminating the runway and was able to land the plane heading towards the light. The lights of the car showed the way. It revealed the way to go.

So light reveals and light also exposes. Simeon recognized that fact too. He says to Mary, the mother of the baby Jesus, "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." So, there we see how Simeon bridges the gap between Christmas and Easter. Whilst holding the baby Jesus, he points forward to the bitterness of the cross. He acknowledges that the coming of Jesus will expose and reveal the sin that lurks in darkness.

I went to a golf range over Christmas with a friend of mine. Now, I should say that in my mind, my swing is a thing of beauty. My back stays straight as I come back. My wrists are at the perfect angle. My follow-through is sweet. My friend videoed my swing, and the full horror of it was revealed. In the

darkness of my imagination, I had deluded myself, and the extent of my delusion was revealed in the light of his video. Also explained why the ball rarely goes straight when I hit it. The video couldn't make my swing any better but at least could expose how bad it is. The coming of the light of Christ both exposes our failings and also offers a way of dealing with them. When we come into the light of Christ, we can examine our own failings and our shortcomings, our sin. We can be honest and confront those, safe in the knowledge that in dying on the cross, Jesus has removed that burden of sin. He exposes our sin and he deals with our sin.

Quoting the reading from Hebrews that we heard, "Jesus made a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people." We can have the ability, the confidence to face up to those things where we know we fall short.

Lastly, I want to mention Simeon's sense of fulfillment that comes across in what he says. He wrote some words that we call the Nunc Dimittis that the choir sang earlier with these words. "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your words, for my eyes have seen your salvation."

Simeon, we're told was righteous and devout. He was in the temple for years waiting for the consolation of Israel, waiting expectantly for the coming of the Messiah. And the Holy Spirit opened Simeon's eyes to recognize in the baby Jesus that he held in his arms that long-promised Messiah. He saw Jesus and was at peace. And what strikes me about this reading is that that was enough for Simeon. He's content. He's fulfilled at the sight of the baby Jesus, the Messiah. If it was me, I can hear myself saying to God, "Ooh, this is exciting. I want to see what happens to this baby. I want to see him grow up. I want to see what the Messiah is like, what the Messiah does." But there's none of that with Simeon. He'd seen enough. The promise has been fulfilled. Now he can go in peace.

What is enough for us? How much of God do we need to see and experience before we find peace? What counts for us as fulfillment? What would we have to experience or know or discover to find the

peace and the fulfillment that Simeon found that day in the temple?

And before I close, I want to say why this reading has a particular resonance for me. That is many people here know that my Father was a rector and he died prematurely when looking after a big and lively church. And the passage we just heard this morning was one of the readings that we had at his funeral. We read the Nunc Dimittis. So, the words, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace," carry a particular resonance for me. They speak of fulfillment, which is not the same as completeness. My father didn't live long enough to see the things that other people like to see in the course of their life, but I still believe that his life was fulfilled. We're called to pray for enough, not everything.

So, we learn two things about Simeon in this, his one appearance in the Bible. Firstly, he identified Jesus as the light. And secondly, he leaves us with the challenge of finding the fulfillment and the peace that only God can bring. Amen.