

FIRST READING – PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Malachi = **MAL**-uh-kee

A reading from the book of the prophet Malachi.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Thus says the Lord God:

“Wee, I am sending my messenger
to prepare the way before me,
and the Lord whom you seek
will suddenly come to his temple.

The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight –
indeed, he is coming,”
says the Lord of hosts.

“But who can endure the day of his coming,
and who can stand when he appears?”

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like a fullers’ soap;
he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver,
and he will purify the sons of Levi
and refine them like gold and silver,
until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.
Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem
will be pleasing to the Lord
as in the days of old and as in former years.”

present = pre-**SENT**



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

It was fitting that God,
for whom and through whom all things exist,
in bringing many sons and daughters to glory,
should make the pioneer of their salvation
perfect through sufferings.
For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified
are all from one.
For this reason
he is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying
“Here am I,
and the children whom God has given me.”
Since the children share flesh and blood,
Jesus himself likewise shared the same things,
so that through death
he might destroy the one who has the power of death,
that is, the devil,
and free those who all their lives were held in slavery
by the fear of death.
For it is clear that he did not come to help Angels,
but the descendants of Abraham.
Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters
in every respect,
so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest
in the service of God,
to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.
Because Jesus himself was tested by what he suffered,
he is able to help those who are being tested.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” * And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the 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.”



GOSPEL READING – PRESENTATION OF THE LORD [CTD.]

There was also a prophet, Anna
the daughter of Phanuel,
of the tribe of Asher.
She was of a great age,
having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,
then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.
She never left the temple
but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.
At that moment she came,
and began to praise God and to speak about the child
to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.
When they had finished everything
required by the law of the Lord,
they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;
and the favour of God was upon him.

Phanuel = fuh-**NYOO**-uhl



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE IN DEPTH

Reading I: Malachi 3:1-4

This passage is an excerpt from a section in which a series of questions is addressed to Yahweh. The statement “You have wearied the Lord” is given in response to the question, “How have we wearied him?” (2:17). The answer is: by denying Yahweh’s justice. Therefore Yahweh will visit his people with judgment. He will send a messenger (the name Malachi means “My messenger,” which may be the reason for the attribution of the name to this book). The messenger will announce a covenant. Then Yahweh will come to his Temple and will purify his ministers and priests so that they may offer pure sacrifices in the Temple.

Christian tradition finds the fulfilment of this prophecy in (1) the sending of John the Baptist (the messenger); (2) the Incarnation – Yahweh coming in the person of Christ to his Temple; and (3) the Eucharist, identified by the early Fathers as the pure offering. The purpose of the Incarnation was seen in the establishment of the eschatological worship of God by a new, eschatological people.

Reading II: Hebrew 2:14-18

In this passage we have one of the clearest statements of the doctrine of the Incarnation in the New Testament. In itself it would not necessarily imply the Son’s pre-existence, for it simply says that he was human like us and shared our common humanity. But the word “shared” (meteschen) is in the aorist tense, which implies that he began to share our humanity at a particular moment, and that there was a time when he did not share it. Further, the hymn with which the letter to the Hebrews opens (1:1-4) shows clearly that the author accepted the pre-existence christology, and therefore his statements here about the humanity of Christ must be taken as an assertion of a real Incarnation. This is stated in three terms: “share”, “shared the same things,” (i.e., “flesh and blood”) [RSV: “partook of the same nature”] and “had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect.” Note here that the term *homoionoma*, “likeness,” has been introduced into christological vocabulary already in the New Testament. Later on, the cognate *homoiosiosis* was found to be inadequate in a christological context. The New Testament authors, had they known of the later heresies of Docetism and Arianism, would probably have avoided these terms. But when the author of Hebrews speaks of “likeness,” he certainly intends full identification with our humanity. The phrase “in every respect” makes this clear.

Not also the purpose clause “so that... he might...” This defines the soteriological purpose of the Incarnation. The doctrine of the Incarnation is not pure metaphysical speculation. It is concerned with the reality of our salvation, as Athanasius and, later, Anselm were to stress. Here that purpose is defined as twofold: (1) the destruction of death and the defeat of the devil (the *Christus victor* type of atonement language, championed in the early twentieth century by the Swedish theologian Gustav Aulen); (2) Christ’s ongoing

work as high priest: because of his humanity and experience share with us, he is able to be a sympathetic and merciful high priest. It is stated that he is a high priest “in the service of God,” that is, his high priestly service is performed in a Godward direction. He offers his sacrifice to God the Father once for all when he passes through the veil at his ascension, and he continually pleads it before the Father (Heb 7:25; 9:24). This is the first occurrence of the term “high priest” in Hebrews. The author proceeds like a musician, giving a few prior adumbrations of this theme before developing it at length. Christ functionally “became” high priest at his ascension. We can see how the idea developed from Ps 110:1 the author of Hebrews moved to verse 4 and so developed the doctrine.

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40 (long form), 2:22-32 (short form)

The long form of the gospel consists of the whole pericope of the presentation, in which Anna as well as Simeon respond to the appearance of the Christ child in the Temple. The short form omits the part about Anna and the concluding summary about the subsequent growth of the child. Unfortunately, the short form loses some of the point: there is a kind of “one-upmanship” in the comparison of Jesus and the Baptist that the short form misses. After his birth, John the Baptist is hailed by only the prophet (his father Zechariah, who sings the *Benedictus*), whereas the Christ Child is hailed by two (Simeon with the *Nunc Dimittis*, and Anna and her thanksgiving to God and her testimony to the bystanders). In addition to this one-upmanship, and perhaps as part of it, Simeon testifies to the universality of the mission of the Christ Child: he is to be not only a glory of Israel but a light to illumine the Gentiles.

One curious feature of this account is that Simeon is given two oracles - the *Nunc Dimittis* and the allocution to Mary, the mother of the child. It has been suggested that this duplication of oracles is the result of Luke’s subsequent addition of the canticle to his infancy narrative.

The *Nunc Dimittis* is probably an early Christian liturgical psalm. Originally this psalm praised God, not just for the birth of the Messiah, but for the Christ-even in its entirety. The second oracle is parallel to that pronounced by Elizabeth in Luke 1:42b-45, though it is rougher in style. The first oracle blesses God for the coming of the Christ and the prospect of salvation for the Gentiles, while the second predicts the future role of the child and his fate in Israel.

Reginald H. Fuller