

Sermon: 2021/01/03 (Feast of the "Presentation"/ Circumcision, Year B) - *Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 84:1-8;* *Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a; Luke 2:22-38_BTR*

[Invite children to the front]

Kids' Talk: 'He Destined us for Adoption as His Children'.

[A selection of children's books about orphans.]

Do you love to read?

[Wait for response.]

Yeah?!

(My) Poppy certainly does.

And, at this age, *many* of her books - *loads* of them, in fact - (it's a bit weird, really) - seem to be about the adventures of *orphans*; children in the care of people-not-their-parents.

And I wonder: can any of you name any famous (fictional) orphans from literature? (From the stories you've read?)

[Wait for response.]

One of my favorite orphans is Superman.

Superman is separated from his natural parents on an alien planet called, "Krypton." And when he comes to earth he is looked after - *he is adopted* - by another couple - "the Kents."

Why do they do this?

Because they are *good*.

Because they are *kind*.

And they protect him and love him as if they were his real family!

And God - because He is good and kind too - has created a new family for *us* to be adopted into too - it's called, "the Church."

Have a look around now.

Go on!

Those people sitting behind you - *all* of them - are *your* brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers *in Christ*.

And those of us who belong to the Church are supposed to protect and love each

other *just* like we would our *biological* family.
What a 'rich' blessing this is!
A *second* family.
And it's a really, *really* big one!

Let's pray:
Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

God's got this.

Allow me to read you again verses twenty-eight through thirty-two from *Luke* -
'[So] Simeon took [Jesus] 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."' [Pause.]
What was the significance of this moment?
Why did our gospel author preserve it for posterity?
This is what I'd like us to ponder, for a few minutes...

My child is the best child in the world.
I have no doubt of it.
I just *know* this to be a true statement.
In my "guts."
She's the most lovely; the most intelligent; the most wonderful child *ever*.
Much more so than yours.
Isn't this what *every* parent thinks?
Initially, at least.
If not in principle;
instinctively.
When that new baby is handed over by the midwife, one is simply...*overcome* by love.
It's almost suffocating.
I was *literally* rendered speechless.
I couldn't even smile.
I simply froze, for a moment; you might say I was "transfigured" by this tiny, mewling, bright pink human-life in my hands.
It was an *awesome* moment, without equal:
terrifying and amazing all at the same time.
But though this notion that "my child is the best;"
that "my child will change the world;"
that "my child will surely excel."

That "my child isn't average" is a common one shared by *most* mums and dads, for how many is it *objectively* true?
(And not just wishful thinking.)

And yet what if someone came along one day - a *complete* stranger to you - and suddenly appeared at your elbow, staring over your shoulder, and said the same thing?

(About your baby.)

That'd be creepy! Unnerving.

And this is essentially - according to *Luke* - the *very* thing that happened to Mary and Joseph at the Temple, *twice*.

They left the stable, cave or whatever it was in Bethlehem where the delivery had been made - where the manger was, and went up to Jerusalem - just a short walk - to do something *very* routine for normal Jewish boys: that is, circumcision.

The Israelites had been performing this on their sons since Abraham in about 1900 B.C.

Now it was about 2 or 3 B.C., and they were still at it.

You see, although the practice seems strange and even "icky" to us, to Jesus' earthly parents back then, and for the following two millennia until this present moment, it was as familiar and commonplace as a trip to the market-place for fish or loaves of bread.

Or a visit to the synagogue on a Saturday.

It was a significant thing to do, mind:

ordered by the Creator Himself, to physically demarcate a chosen nation from all other peoples.

Other groups do it now themselves, of course - Muslims, for example - but only in imitation; *their* custom of circumcision is derivative.

No, to have the foreskin ritualistically removed was originally a *unique* thing that showed the world you were the member of a certain *small* group of Semites, once end,aged in Egypt - an inheritor of ancient, powerful promises to one long-dead patriarch in particular.

That you were the beneficiary - simply *by birth(!)*; not by merit - of a "Covenant," *freely* bestowed, by a gracious God, long, *long* ago, in prehistory.

As such, circumcision was an incredible prefigurement of the Gospel of eternal life by Christ's substitutionary death on the cross.

A gift given to all who sincerely claim it, which is never earned.

Joseph and Mary were at the Temple, then, to "claim" something remarkable for their family, yes, but it was still also completely routine for *Jewish* couples like them to do what they were doing.

And then Simeon came along.

And, after him, Anna.

Both bearing and proclaiming an *extraordinary* testimony confirming about the baby in His parents' arms what they privately believed - *what every parent believes* - but which was also *sooo(!)* unbelievable in its actual *specifics* that it demanded this unsolicited, spontaneous, *repeated* corroboration.

So, the Lord used faithful people who were also doing something (else) "routine" - worshipping Him in a sacred space - to verify what every first-time parent *feels* - that *this* child - Mary and Joseph's child - really *would* change the world, really *would* be "above average;" really *would* "excel" in the *only* quality truly interesting to the Lord

- in holiness;

in moral perfection;

in living such a virtuous life - both of the mind and outwardly - that He - Jesus - was acceptable as an intercessory sacrifice for the sins of *all* of us, so that we might benefit from a *second* Covenant - a Covenant for Gentiles descended from nobodies and everybodies; "mutts" and "mongrels" like us.

And this was the plan all along.

God's plan.

Just look at *Jeremiah*:

Jeremiah the prophet was alive at about the half-way point between when Abraham performed the first circumcision (in the early Bronze Age) and Jesus' circumcision.

So, *many* hundreds of years before Christ was brought to the Temple - *Herod's* Temple, that is, and what do we see?

We see that Jeremiah was given a vision of this building - he had witnessed the destruction of the first one - *Solomon's* - by the Babylonians, you see - and in this vision he saw people like Simeon and Anna joyously making use of the replacement.

Simeon and Anna were descended from the people God had brought 'from the land of the north' as he promised to Jeremiah's audience He would.

- To be witnesses to His return to that holy place in incarnate form.

And I think this is what we need to bear in mind as we contemplate the year that was and the year that lies ahead - that whatever *has* happened, and whatever *may* happen, God's. Got. This.

Let me repeat that (Americanism) -

God's got this.

There will be misfortune.

There will be elections - some will go our way and some won't.

There will be loss.

But 'the Lord has ransomed Jacob' (from Exile), and doing so "set the scene" (later) for all others to be "ransomed" too: you and me.

Clearly, then - to repeat, *God's got this.*

Let's make that our mantra, and let us make a resolution now, together - that that

truth will suffuse and permeate the people we're going to be in 2021.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, amen.