



"La Presentación de Cristo en El Templo"

**Centre Congregational Church, UCC
Brattleboro, Vermont
December 31, 2023
10:00am service**

The Reverend Dr. Scott Couper

**“Boy, They Sure Do Grow-Up Fast;
Don’t They?”**

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

When I first read this scripture reading, my first response was “Wait a minute! This is too fast! We just celebrated Jesus’ birth and now he is already forty days old (Leviticus 12, Exodus 13:12-15). No!” I also thought to myself, “Boy, they sure do grow up fast, don’t they?”

It seems that the lectionary calendar is taking us too quickly away from the nativity scene. Like the Peter, James, and John during the Transfiguration, I want the Christmas moment to last. I want to build a tents, or ‘booths’, for us to pitch so we can linger at the stable for a few more months, or at least a few more weeks (Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2–3, Luke 9:28–36). It as only been a week and Jesus is already over a month old. Boy, they sure do grow up fast!

Perhaps some of you felt the same way this holiday season after seeing any sons or daughters, any neices or newfews, neighborhood children, or even beloved pets with whom we have shared the years. As you know, my children were just visiting with me. I remember just yesterday I was changing their nappies, taking them to preschool, and watching their grade school sporting events. Boy, they sure do grow up fast!

And yet when I remember the past and lament its passing, I enjoy the present. I love the people they have become. And as both begin to conclude their higher education and begin to contemplate their future vocations, I look forward to their futures. I also think about how they will be future partners and parents, perhaps, someday.

This is the perfect time, New Years’ Eve day, to think about children and ourselves and who is that they and we have been, are, and will be. Our scripture reading this morning assists us with this task. Christmas morning a week ago is still fresh in our hearts and minds. The nativity child has just been born. Today, the infant is presented at the Temple, part of the religious ritual practiced by Jews. The first ritual is circumcision eight days after birth; then dedication at the Temple at forty days. And then last, at least in contemporary times, a *barmitzvah* is celebrated when a boy turns twelve.

Our scripture reading looks back on the past, dedicates in the present, and looks forward to Jesus’ future ministry. All this is done through Simeon’s Prayer prayed after seeing Jesus for the first time before he himself died. Simeon prayed:

“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 the revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of your people Israel.”

This prayer is one of my favorite prayers and I almost always pray it at funerals and gravesite services. For me, the prayer marks an ending of a life well lived. When someone has been faithful to a partner, to their children, to their vocation, to their grandchildren, and to their church, I love to utter the words, “Now dismiss your servant in peace” because it signals finality and closure with recognition and profound appreciation.

And is that not what we are to be doing today on December 31? Should we all not be saying a benedictory prayer than acknowledges to God the gift that is our life and thanking God for it!? Should we not have closure and finality with deep gratitude for what has been?

And I love to utter the words, “for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for all peoples” because it looks forward into the future with optimism and, again, deep appreciation for that which is to come.

Today, on this New Year’s Eve day let us, like at a funeral, give God thankful praise for that which is final and closed. We cannot change it. And tomorrow, on New Year’s Day, let us offer God thanks and praise for what is to come.

When at a funeral for a loved-one who was faithful, we acknowledge the former life lived well and we acknowledge the future of life eternal because they are both full of the blessings of God.

Friends, this New Year’s Eve Day, thank God for the blessing of your life – no matter the hardships you endured and no matter the good fortune you received. And this New Year’s Day, thank God for the blessings of your life to come – no matter the hardships you endured and no matter the good fortune you received.

Like Simeon, let us through the life of Jesus the Christ, realize that all the Earth, all of Creation (and that includes you and me for you are every bit a part of Creation!) will receive that which you have prepared for us in the past, in the present, and in the future, forever, eternally. Friends in Christ, ‘Happy New Year’!

This was the world of God. And it was preached to the people of God. And the people of God responded, “Amen!”