

## **Fourth Sunday in Advent – 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024**

### **The Fourth and Fifth Joyful Mysteries:**

#### **The Presentation and the Finding of the Child Jesus in The Temple**

When Jesus was forty days old, Mary went with Joseph to the temple for the Jewish ceremony of purification even though, being without sin, both original and personal, she needed neither spiritual nor ritual purification. She went nevertheless to fulfil the requirements of the Mosaic law.

In his 1990 book 'The Pain and the Glory – a Journey in Israel through the Rosary', the Anglican author and chaplain Rev William Weston observed that at this point, other than Mary and Joseph, only Elizabeth and the shepherds had recognised Jesus as the Messiah. He goes on to rhetorically query whether we should be surprised that, in light of the prophesy in Malachi 3:1 'The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come into his temple', the High Priest of Israel had not been informed by angelic message of Jesus' birth. But, of course, the great and the good were not those to whom God chose initially to reveal the identity of his Son.

Instead, an elderly man, Simeon, 'upright and devout' was 'prompted by the Spirit' to come to the Temple, having previously had it revealed to him by the Spirit that he would not die until he had seen Christ. In his praise to God, Simeon utters the words of the famous Canticle, the Nunc Dimittis 'now let your servant depart in peace', which, in our reflection for the Second Sunday in Advent, we saw is regularly paired with Mary's Magnificat in church worship.

In his book 'Simeon's Song – Meditations on the Nunc Dimittis', Fr Andrew of the Society of Divine Compassion comments, 'Simeon standing with the divine child in his arms spoke for all who were ready to trust love in the hour of death. He held in his arms not only the light of God's revelation, but also the mystery of God's method. God's plan of salvation had its first revelation in the form of a human baby.' (*London and Oxford: Mowbray 1943*)

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Fast forward twelve years, through those hidden years of Jesus' childhood, and we encounter a fraught Mary searching desperately for her lost pre-teen. In the vast number of people making their way home to Nazareth after their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus had become separated from his family.

Initially Mary and Joseph assume he is in amongst other friends and relations and 'only after a day's journey' they become understandably concerned and go all the way back to Jerusalem 'looking for him everywhere'. The sense of rising fear in Mary's heart is palpable. Many of us have experienced that awful stomach-churning feeling of dread and panic upon losing a child in a supermarket, even if just for a few moments, and can begin to imagine

how Mary must have felt. Not surprisingly, Mary lovingly chides Jesus upon finding him 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.' Her words are strikingly similar to those of today's parents, 'What sort of time do you call this?'; 'Why didn't you text us to tell us you had arrived safely?'

When Jesus gives his explanation, there is no real closure to the incident. Mary and Joseph simply 'did not understand what he meant' and we are told that later 'Mary stored up all these things in her heart'.

This fifth Joyful Mystery reminds us that Mary did not have an overview of how her family's life was going to pan out or what was to happen in the hours or days ahead of her. She had to trust every day, just as we do, that God would reveal his plan for her life and for the life of her son. We are encouraged to imitate Mary's life of contemplation and absolute trust in God as we live day by day and moment by moment.

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