

Happy Groundhog Day! Have you ever noticed how a groundhog looks an awful lot like a woodchuck? So that got me thinking: How much ground would a groundhog hog if a ground hog would hog ground? By the way, did you hear about the groundhog that tried to get to the other side of a well by burrowing under it? It didn't go very well. Okay, that's all I have. Has anybody heard any **other** groundhog day jokes? Because it feels like I keep hearing the same ones over and over and over again!

Well, here we are on February 2nd. And it's big day! Not only is it because this is the one day of the year when we rely on a small, furry animal for our weather forecast, but here at First Lutheran today it's our Annual Pancake Breakfast! I tried coming up with some pancake jokes too, but they all seemed to fall pretty **flat**... like a pancake... flat.

At any rate, it's also a big day because of all the new entertaining commercials that will be on TV this evening! Oh, and the Super Bowl, too!

Another very interesting fact about today, February 2nd, 2020, is that it is written backward **and** forward for everyone in the whole world. Here in America we place the month first. In European countries, the day is placed first and in many Asian countries, the year comes first. So whether you're in Europe, Asia, or the U. S., today, is a very special palindromic day. The world hasn't seen any date like it in over 900 years! (Since Nov., 11th, 1111.) And unless the Lord returns first, the next time something like this will happen will be on December 12th of the year 2121!

But for us here, here and now, today, February 2nd means that it's 40 days after Christmas. And **that** means we remember an event that is very significant for our lives as Christians. It's the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and as we'll see, everything changes when Jesus comes to the temple for us.

It's the 40th day after the first Christmas and Mary and Joseph have brought their baby boy to the Temple in Jerusalem. By doing this, they are keeping the laws of the Torah, what we call the Old Testament. Mary and Joseph have brought the infant Jesus to the temple to present Him God.

People there are waiting! A man is waiting, probably a very elderly man, for a promise by the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled. His name is Simeon and his life will soon be changed forever. An 84 year-old widow named Anna is also there. She has spent her whole long life in the temple, "worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day" (v 37): Anna's life will be changed forever, too. And then there are Mary and Joseph, their lives will definitely be changed forever. The same goes for you and me, and for every Christian man, woman, and child; everything will change.

First, there are Jesus' parents. Mary and Joseph were very ordinary-looking people and they were poor. We know that because of the offering they give this day. Leviticus called for a lamb to be sacrificed at the presentation of a firstborn, along with a pigeon or dove. But if you cannot afford a lamb, then it's "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (v 24). That's the situation with Mary and Joseph. If you had been at the temple to worship that day, you may not have even noticed them. They would've blended in very well with the rest of the crowd.

Mary and Joseph were much like any other parents. When you ask parents what they wish for their child, the answer is always something like happiness, health, a long life; maybe that their child would grow up in the faith, maybe that their child would be a "good person." Very often parents also express their fears about their kids. They hope that they'll be safe from harm, won't get into drugs and alcohol or a bad relationship. They hope that their child won't be corrupted by what's on the internet or on TV. They pray that their child will never have to be sent off to war.

And what do **these** parents, Mary and Joseph, hear about Jesus? They hear Simeon's prophetic word: "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts will be revealed" (vv 34-35).

Even though Mary and Joseph don't appear to be very important people, the Son they carry to the temple will turn the world upside down. And so He won't have our version of happiness. He will **lose** His health for the world's sake. His earthly life **won't** be a long one. Those **in** the faith will consider Him to be **outside** of it. He won't be safe from harm; He **will** hang out with alcohol abusers and people with bad reputations. And He'll be sent off to a **war** against nothing less than sin, death, the devil, & hell.

He will bring about the fall and rising of many in Israel, just as Simeon said. In fact, Jesus will bring about the fall and rising of the whole **world**. He is the stumbling block, Scripture says. Those who are offended by Him, those who reject His love, those who want the world to stay its old broken, hurtful way, will **fall** before Him.

But the lowly, the meek, those who suffer, the sinful, the repentant, the hopeless, the lost, the lonely, those who are wearied by the world- they will be **raised up** by Him. Simeon was one of them. He was a man on a mission, always looking, always searching, always living on the promised hope that he wouldn't die until somehow, sometime, some way, he would see the face of the Lord. He would not have peace until he saw the Lord's Christ with his own eyes. That peace gave a song that we still sing today: "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation" (vv 29-30).

Anna was also one who had been made weary by the world. In her 84 years, she had seen it **all**, including the death of her husband and maybe one or more of her children. She lived in a time when her country was occupied by Roman soldiers. Political corruption was rampant. There was unfair taxation that fell heavily on the poor. And even the temple where she took refuge knew greedy priests and faithless teachers.

Yet in the midst of all this was Anna—faithful, loyal, fasting and praying, and waiting—until *this* day, until *this* Child came to the temple. "And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (v 38). Like the shepherds we heard at Bethlehem 40 days ago, Anna could not stop speaking of God's great mercy in the Child who changed the world.

This Child **is** the one who changes the world. And this is how He does it: He fulfills the Law on our behalf. Every last detail of all that God commanded and demanded is completed in Him. That's the reason Mary and Joseph have brought Him to the temple. Mary came to the temple for her "purification according to the Law of Moses" (v 22). Yes, God had declared that women after giving birth had to offer a sacrifice—in the case of a poor family, two turtledoves or two young pigeons.

But this sacrifice wasn't required to pay for some sin in the mother or because childbirth itself created some kind of guilt. Instead, it reminded that the sin of Adam and Eve was always being passed down to the next generation. There was no escaping it, any more than someone could make his way into the world without being born. And sin always requires a sacrifice.

But there was **one** exception, one who entered the world by birth **without** inheriting sin. **This** very child was without sin, because no human father passed it down to him: "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the **Virgin** Mary."

And that was God's perfect plan so that Christ could fulfill the Law for those who **did** enter the world thoroughly corrupted in sin: you and me. Mary's purification was a picture of the purifying **we** needed; without it, we would be lost forever. **Jesus is presented in the temple as our substitute so that we would be purified.**

In those moments when **you** feel weary of this world, as if everything around you is out of control, you can cling in faith, like Anna did, to the promise that God is not only still ruling the universe, but He is very present right here, right now where you are to give you His comfort.

Like Simeon, our eyes also are opened to see Him even in the worst of times. In Jesus' weakness, here as the 40-day-old baby, we see our salvation. In our weakness, when we are helpless as a baby, we have the Lord's salvation in His Word and Sacraments. The light of the world does not come as a lightning bolt, but as the tender light of Mary's little Son.

It's true, He doesn't stay little. But here already as we see Jesus the little one, we see what He has come to do. Not only will He keep all the Law perfectly in your place, but He will also provide the payment, the atonement, the redemption price, that covers all your sin so that you can come to His place.

Mary and Joseph couldn't afford a lamb to sacrifice, but there is more to it here than their poverty. The **lamb** is really the baby in their arms. As John the Baptist pointed Him out to us a couple weeks ago, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The sacrifice, the final sacrifice, will not be made until this Lord returns to the temple again over 30 years later, only to be cast out, pierced and nailed

to a cross outside the temple, for us, for our forgiveness. He will **fall** into the pains of death, into the sorrow of burial, for us. But He will **rise** for us, so that, as we pray today in the Collect, “we may be presented to [God] with pure and clean hearts.”

That is who we are because of this day. 40 days after Christmas, and our salvation is growing and showing. We are now Simeon, ready to depart in peace. We are now Anna, speaking to one another what God has done. We are Mary, a sword piercing through **our** souls, until the day that our eyes are opened for good, to see the Lord’s salvation, to look on the Light of the World, to rejoice in the Lamb of God, to dwell forever in His peace. Amen.