

Presentation of the Lord in the Temple Smuggling What?

Today, we encounter the Holy Spirit and learn why this member of the Trinity is so very important in our lives. Sure, there are other characters in today's Gospel story – not the least of which is Jesus, the Messiah – but in this particular episode, the Holy Spirit is the star of the show.

Mary and Joseph arrive at the temple with their small child, Jesus, in Mary's arms. With hearts full of love for God and the desire to be obedient to God's will, they are drawn to the temple to worship.

At the same time, Simeon was drawn to the temple as well. The Holy Spirit is at work bringing together the young family from Nazareth and a righteous, devout man. Simeon is looking forward to the "consolation of Israel". We are told that the Holy Spirit rests on this man and has revealed to him that he will not see death until he has seen the LORD's Messiah.

Simeon lays eyes on the infant Jesus and instantly knows that he is looking at the Messiah. "My eyes have seen your Salvation," he declares aloud to God in praise. How astounding. Simeon looks at a helpless child and knows this tiny little creature, who can't even yet walk or talk, is one day going to redeem and rule all the world.

Now, this isn't a lucky guess on Simeon's part, nor is it because he is super smart, that he knows he's looking at the Messiah. He may be smart but it's not his intelligence that has revealed this knowledge to him. The Holy Spirit has opened Simeon's eyes to see something right in front of him that he would have otherwise missed. This ordinary looking little bundle of joy was going to grow up into someone extraordinary – the Messiah.

After meeting Simeon, the Holy Spirit then introduces the small family from Nazareth to a very old, very devout woman named Anna. How do we know the Holy Spirit is involved once again? Because Anna is named a prophet. You don't get the title of "prophet" unless the presence of God – the Holy Spirit – is with you, guiding you to deliver, on God's behalf, the message he has for his people.

Like Simeon, Anna spots the infant Jesus and sees what others do not see. She immediately proclaims the message – to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel – that they were looking at that redemption in the child right before their eyes.

Perhaps you have noticed that there is an awful lot, in this short passage, about “eyes”, and “seeing”, about “looking” and “being guided”.

It is absolutely no coincidence that Luke writes all of that stuff about eyes, and seeing, and looking, and guiding, in the same passage where the Holy Spirit figures prominently. No coincidence.

We do not always see what is plainly in front of our eyes. Researchers call this “inattentive blindness”. We don’t see the decadent cake on the counter because we’re intently focused on the coffee in the pot next to it. When we are busy looking for something or focused on one thing, we don’t see other things in plain sight. There is also the fact that, even when we *do* see what is in front of us, we do not recognize it for what it is.

There is a story of an older woman who used to cross the Brazilian frontier every day, riding a motor scooter with a sack of sand slung over her shoulder. One day the border guard being suspicious, stopped her, and said, “Excuse me, ma’am, what do you have in that sack?”

“Only sand, sir,” she replied. He made her dump out the contents of the sack and, sure enough, it contained only sand.

The next day, the old woman came by on her motor scooter once again, sack of sand slung over her shoulder. The guard could not believe there was nothing suspicious about this repeated border crossing and, so, again he asked her what was in the sack. “Only sand,” was the reply and as the sack was emptied in front of him, the guard saw only sand.

This happened every day for about two weeks until finally he stopped her and said, “Look, I promise I won’t arrest you. I won’t report you to the authorities, but I need to know...are you smuggling or not?”

“Yes, sir. I am” came the honest response.

Taken aback a little, the guard then said, “Well then, tell me...what are you smuggling?” And with a smile the old woman said, “Scooters.”

“Looks can be deceiving,” or “You can’t judge a book by its cover,” are popular catch-phrases that comes to mind. There was the practice in the middle-ages that, in believing Jesus to wander the earth on Christmas Eve trying to find people who would take him in, villagers would have to open their doors to strangers and vagabonds and provide hospitality in case it was Jesus they were actually hosting.

If we could remember our baptismal promise to seek and serve Christ in all people, the world would be a very different kind of place. One group of researchers studying inattentional blindness summed up their findings by saying, “the most effective cloaking device is the human mind.” To uncloak our minds, help is needed. Luke lets us know that our help comes from the Holy Spirit. If we want to see what God has placed in front of our eyes, we need the guidance of God’s presence – of the Holy Spirit – to help us truly see.

To truly “see” means more than just physical sight. To “see” in the Gospels means to know, to understand. Just as Simeon and Anna saw a baby like everyone else saw a baby, they knew who and what this baby truly was. The Messiah, salvation, redemption. Truly seeing doesn’t just mean seeing the good in people and things around us, but also seeing what is *not* good – seeing past false fronts or glittering exteriors. This is what Jesus taught his disciples when he told them the beautiful, gleaming temple would be utterly destroyed. Its beauty was a cover for the greed and the corruption that infected the powerful in charge.

Seeing what is broken enables us to work with God to mend it. The Holy Spirit is not simply *dwelling* in us; the Holy Spirit is *active* through us. A tour through Luke’s Gospel shows us very quickly how active the Spirit is: helping John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus, conceiving Jesus in Mary’s womb, helping Jesus withstand the wilderness temptations, helping the disciples evangelize with boldness, and the list goes on.

And that Spirit – that amazing, active person of the Trinity – dwells in us. That Spirit, who rested on Jesus at his baptism, rests on us through our baptism. That Spirit is our gift from God. What Jesus did for the disciples when he was with them, the Spirit continues to do for us. The Holy Spirit teaches, leads, validates, and empowers. What does the Spirit teach? What does the Spirit empower us to do? Luke gives us the answer to that too.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” Jesus says. “And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit – whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine – will empower us to do whatever it takes to further God’s purpose to reconcile all things to himself through Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit that guides and nourishes the church, giving us the confidence to know God’s purpose *will* be fulfilled. In today’s Gospel we heard that Simeon was “looking forward to the consolation of Israel” and Anna proclaimed to those “looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” In both cases, the word “looking” carries the sense of “expectantly awaiting.” So, not just eager but certain – knowing it will happen. God’s time is not our time. God is not limited to traveling in a straight line through time as we are. God has already accomplished the fulness of his kingdom and is drawing all things through our time toward that fulness. The signs are all around us if we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our vision.

God is at work, in us and through us, and in the world...guiding, teaching, transforming. When we look at the world and the creatures in it, let us see with *God’s* eyes. That doesn’t mean seeing through rose-coloured glasses but, rather, through *love*-coloured glasses. Like Jesus, we, too, are filled with God’s wisdom. We, too, can grow strong in God. God’s favour is upon *us* so that we are a part of the salvation, the redemption planned for the whole world through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Let us open our eyes and see.