

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 2, 2025



## AMAZED

*but not actually surprised*

by Drew Downs

When Mary and Joseph bring the baby Jesus into the Temple as their firstborn son, a practice of presentation and ritual offering to God in gratitude and service, they hear from Simeon words of exaltation and they are amazed. We shouldn't hear this as surprise, though; not in the sense that they didn't know this stuff about Jesus — they clearly did. They knew the work God was doing *at least*, and that Mary, as mother, was given an incredible honor.

These are words of a priest, filled with the Holy Spirit, however, and that Jesus himself is the culmination of the man's work — perhaps waiting and anticipating. And Jesus as a light to the *Gentiles* and glory of Israel, that had to hit different. I don't believe they are surprised by the liberative character of God, but are amazed by the scope and that their son, still just an infant, could be the whole thing, the centerpiece of the revolution, even that Simeon, too, can see what they see.

# AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2025

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### **Creative Leadership**

It is with great gratitude that I give praise to those who make this, our 185th year as a congregation a time of great joy and anticipation! At our annual congregational meeting of the church, we elected new vestry members in Jennifer Berry, Don Bryan, and John Hegedus. We elected delegates to convention, including Zach Anderson and Lisa O'Donnell. Our Senior Warden this year is Robin Willis. Junior Warden is Bill Allen. Clerk is Linda Airhart. Treasurer is Peggy Allen.

Our attention this year naturally falls under the title of evangelism – seeking to connect with the community for the love and grace of the gospel. We'll explore ways to engage in this activity with generous hearts and far less fear. And one of the essential aspects of this grace-led evangelism is simply *JOY*. Seeking and celebrating in the joyous spirit of God. Doing things we love to do, encountering them with others, and seeing what God is up to in that is essential to living a life of joy.

We don't usually associate the story of Cain and Abel with joy, but it *begins* with a story of God's joy and delight in the generous *creativity* of Abel. And Cain becomes jealous of God's delight in his brother. Jealous that God loves to be surprised with joyous creativity. Of generous love and inspired hearts.

This is our work this year – exploring joy, surprise, and creativity. To seek new life through new creation. To be inspired so as to inspire. To be a people of new, evocative hope and grace. To lead this community to a new life in faith.

With love,  
Drew

# AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2025

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*

February 2, 2025

### **Collect**

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly pray that, as your only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple, so we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts by Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him 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."

# AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

## Reflection

Jesus's visit to the temple is auspicious, amazing even. Simeon is guided by the Holy Spirit as Jesus will be after his baptism. The pronouncement of Jesus's destiny is resonant with Mary's own revelation years before in the Magnificat. Anna, the prophet, responds as Zechariah did to God's miracle in giving him a son in John the Baptist at the beginning of the story – and how the disciples will respond to the resurrection at the end of the story.

Here, at the temple, we don't just have prophecy as the prediction of the future, we have prophecy as the love and generous transformative grace of God that is intended for the people. And we are offered grace in receiving it now.

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