



Meditation for the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord

February 7, 2021 (Transferred)

*Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of springs,
for the early rains have covered it with pools of water. [Psalm 84.5]*

This day marks 40 days after the birth of Jesus. It is also the midpoint between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. Since the early Middle Ages it has been marked by a candlelight procession in remembrance of the words of Simeon, the prophet who greeted Mary, Joseph, and Jesus at the temple with the words, ‘*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.*’ [Luke 2:29-32]

By blessing our candles we renew our own promise to affirm the Light of Christ within and among us. We promise to *be* the Light of Christ for everyone whose life we touch. May our candle remind us of this Light—the Light that will never go out; the Light that will be with us no matter how dark our days; the Light that will help us see that God is with us in ways and places where it seems most unlikely. May our candles remind us that there is a goodness at work in the world that will never be defeated, even if it is a goodness that will not erase trouble and pain.

With Mary we learn that the fulfillment of God’s promise will *pierce our hearts*. From Malachi, we learn that the fulfillment of God’s promise will bring clarity at a price: the reassurance we seek will bring with it pain as intense as purification by fire, as jarring as being scrubbed by a soap that peals away our skin. At the same time, even when our hearts are pierced we will be able to find meaning. Even when we are in the pain of a purifying fire we will witness God’s promise, and even when it feels like our whole being rubbed raw, we will know that God has not abandoned us. From Luke and Malachi we learn that the fulfillment of God’s promise does not mean that our lives will be easy, but that they will be immeasurably meaningful.

This week I have kept returning to a poem by Mary Oliver:

The Uses of Sorrow | Mary Oliver [in *Thirst*, 2007]

(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)

Someone I loved once gave me

a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand

that this, too, was a gift.

This year has indeed a “box full of darkness,” and perhaps that is why the candlelight of this Sunday is particularly poignant and meaningful. May the candlelight we share show us the gifts hidden in the darkness and loss of these past months. May it enable us to begin imagining a future that is both new and familiar.