

The Readings on This Day

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Presentation of Our Lord

On the fortieth day after Christmas, the medieval Western church celebrated the story in Luke 2, which conflates two rituals: the presentation to God of one's firstborn son, who was then bought back—redeemed—with the offering of animals destined for sacrifice; and the purification of the mother after childbirth. In keeping with the liturgical practice of forty-day observances, this celebration marks the conclusion of the Christmas season. All the infancy narratives in the gospels point to Christ's death and to the salvation it brought to the world, and this festival, with its accent on the Song of Simeon, exemplifies this pattern.



[Malachi 3:1-4](#)

Christians have seen in Malachi's oracle a picture of Jesus Christ as the one who comes to the temple to reinstate the covenant with God. This infant will burn away all impurities. The lectionary sets this oracle next to Luke 2, a narrative of Jesus coming to the temple. Christ is now the temple, the place where we seek and meet God.

[The Psalm for the Day](#)

[Psalm 84](#) inserts worshipers into the Lucan narrative, for now it is all of us who are glad to be in the temple. The psalm is filled with metaphors: God's dwelling is like the sparrow's nest, water in the desert, the heights of Zion, the king's court, the place of the light of the sun, and a shield of protection. For Christians, Christ is the temple in whom we encounter all these good things.

[Hebrews 2:14-18](#)

While the readings from Luke and Malachi point to Christ's divine power to save, this passage from Hebrews proclaims the humanity of Christ, who, for example in the ritual of the presentation, participated in regular human religious rituals. Simeon is an example of a believer who in holding Christ has been freed from "the fear of death" (v.15). A longer version of this excerpt was proclaimed on the Sunday after Christmas.

[Luke 2:22-40](#)

Luke's narrative of Jesus presented in the temple is a down-payment on the death of Christ. Animals are slaughtered, the infant son is temporarily saved from sacrifice, and two old people are themselves ready to die. Yet this word of death is the very light of the world, who in time will be the lamb that is slain. In Luke's story, Simeon knows that the infant will bring about the world's salvation and that the future will cause Mary grief; and Anna tells others about the redemption, not of only the infant boy, but of all the people.