

Last Sunday afternoon, while you were gathered for the inaugural event of Bach Meditations, we were attending Evensong at St. Paul's Cathedral in London England. Perhaps like Bach Meditations, Evensong at St. Paul's was grand and gorgeous, full of visitors and tourists, some of whom didn't quite know what they signed up for when they sat down under the great dome of St. Paul's. You couldn't help but sit in awe of it all. It was precise, and flawless and full of acoustic resonance. It was also so cold that our feet on the stone floor had lost all sense of feeling by the end of the liturgy, but outside the parks of London were adorned with green grass, trees in blossoms and daffodils poking up from the ground. Today it all seems a world away.

Tonight's Evensong anticipates one of the oldest feasts of the Christian church - the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, sometimes called Candlemas. It is transferred from this coming Thursday, February 2, and marks 40 days after Christmas. In some places it is the last service that the nativity scene is present, and for

others there is a custom - as we focus on Simeon's words pointing to Jesus as the Light - to bring out the full inventory of candles for the year and have them blessed. We won't be doing that this evening. And for others, it is the sign of whether a second winter is in store by the sighting of the shadows of the groundhog.

I do want to focus our attention on the two characters of the Temple, Simeon and Anna. In their old age, they were both given the extraordinary gift of seeing and handling the eternal Word made flesh, and something in them knew what it was they were looking at and holding.



As Simeon holds Jesus in his arms it would perhaps have been an experience like Moses coming down from the mountain enveloped in the cloud, and his face was glowing so much that he had to veil it. For Simeon this was the glory of God cradled in his arms; a light for all people.

It was a moment that he had dreamed of for a lifetime and now was real.

So overwhelmed by the experience the only words that came from Simeon's lips were words of fulfillment and satisfaction, that his life was now complete: "Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

While such a sight allowed Simeon's life to end in peace, for Mary it launched her into a journey that would, as Simeon described "pierce her soul with a sword," and for others, this child would be a sign that will be opposed and expose the inner thoughts of their hearts. Clearly the shining of such a pure and eternal uncreated light has the capacity to bring peace, but also the capacity to expose the shadows.

For the widow Anna, who basically lived in the Temple, her gaze on the child prompted her to speak with an overflowing gratitude and praise because she recognized that in this child would be the redemption of Jerusalem.

Simeon and Anna are two people who had given their lives to the work and worship of the Temple; and when they encountered the Christ child they were so overwhelmed that they couldn't help but offer their praise.

As we approach the 40th day of Christmas, we hear the witness and testimony of Simeon and Anna, and we share in the glow of the Light for all people; a Light that we so desperately cling to and are drawn to. Like Simeon and Anna we too offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, because we have come to know that in this Light, while our shadows are exposed, at the same time our redemption is fulfilled.

*Image: Rembrandt, Simeon in the Temple, 1665-1669,
Oil on canvas.
National Museum, Sweden.*