

new empire rise and I've seen how our leaders bend over backwards to fit in with the regime.

Everyone calls me a prophetess. I think that means they're scared of me. People are always scared of independent women with something to say.

The priests and lawyers try to shut me up. Say I am a stupid old woman. The three words they treat as ultimate insults.

As if God treats the old with such contempt. As if women are second rate. As if my lack of a teacher's education means I could not know what was on God's heart.

In our leaders' eyes all of that is true.

I've never claimed to speak the truth, only to seek it. If I am a prophetess, that just means I want to see justice and mercy and goodness prevail.

I want to see a world where the poor are fed and respected and where the rich are held to account. I want to see a world where women and girls aren't considered inferior. I want to see a world where anyone who doesn't fit the neat ideas about righteousness of our leaders isn't mocked and spat on and thrown out.

I do not want to be tolerated.

I want us to know the outrageousness of God's love.

I shuffled over to hear what Simeon had to say. He rarely speaks and when he does it's mostly free from nonsense.

He talked of the child in his arms as the light to light the way of all people to

God.

Well, even the smartest of us can talk rubbish. And when I peered in and saw the face of the child he held, I was sure he had.



It was just a baby.

Babies are nothing. Babies are weak. Babies have no power except to call out our care and love. What use is a baby? This one wasn't even goodlooking.

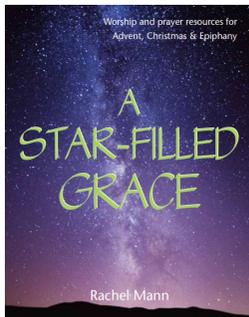
That's when I got the point. God's point.

This is the baby of peasants. This child has nothing. No status, no power, no position. It can't speak. It relies on our love.

I saw that this is how God wants to work with us. I saw that this is what the Kingdom might look like.

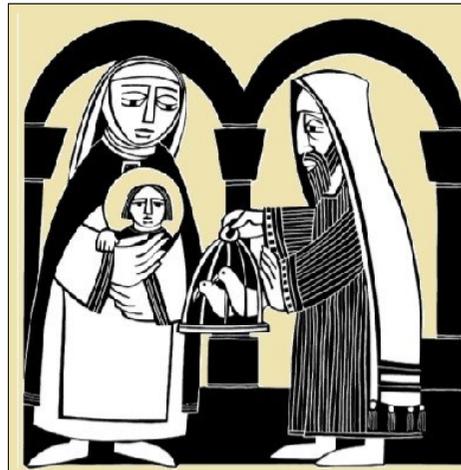
I smiled. I sang.

Thank you to Rachel Mann for her reflections from her excellent book, **A Star-Filled Grace**, published by the Wild Goose Press from the Iona Community.



NAMBUCCA VALLEY ANGLICANS SUNDAY PAPERS

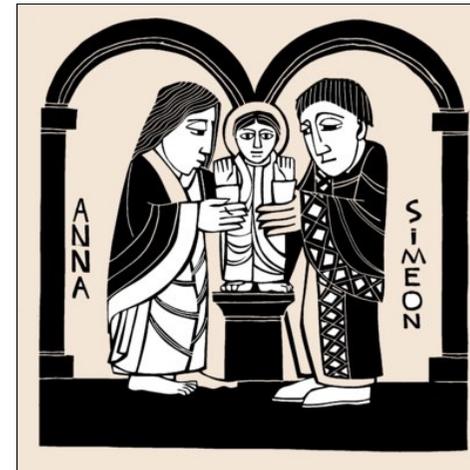
TEMPLE
30.01.2022



Pictured above are Mary and Joseph bringing the Christ child with their sacrifice to the Temple as today is the **Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple** (or **Candlemas** for short)

One last look back from whence we have come - the excitement of the birth of Jesus with the attendant angels, shepherds, Magi and all the ephemera we have added over the years - and now we prepare to turn our faces towards Ash Wednesday and onto the cross in a month's time on 2 March.

Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple for the "purification rites required by the Law of Moses", Lk 2:22. Let us be inspired by Simeon, righteous and devout, and Anna, a prophet.



SIMEON Luke 2:25-35

A promise is a terrible thing. It's the mark of a bond. It's a guarantee. Think of what God said would be our due. A promised land. A land of milk and honey.

But the cost. Our ancestors walked forty years in the wilderness. Thousands and thousands dead. Generations born into slavery who never truly escaped. It's a terrible thing to be offered a promise of good news. To never live to see it yourself.

They brought the child to the Temple. It was just another day. Hundreds of people – priests, Levites, people in search of hope, beggars at the gate – everywhere. And along the edges of the court, the old folk. Trying to keep out of

the sun and away from the flies.



I'd been coming here day after day for years. Ever since my wife had died. I felt closer to her when I was here. I could pray. I felt closer to God.

Closer to God! I felt close to God once. I'd been one of those enthusiastic young men who shaped their whole life around prayer and fasting. I prayed, as they say, without ceasing. I swore off every indulgence. And I knew God. I knew the God who led us through the wilderness, who is the burning bush. I knew the God who provides. I knew the God who keeps his promises.

I received a promise. A promise I wouldn't die before I saw Israel's salvation. Just to say it sounds ridiculous. To say you can receive a promise from God. It didn't seem so crazy when I was young. When life was in front of me. When I felt special. Blessed. I had news. Good news. And I tried to share it.

Time makes fools of us all. I grew up. I married. I had children. And life got complicated. The promise of the wilderness became a mirage. Just another set of words I couldn't let go. Just another way I felt I had to be faithful to an old self.

The older I got, the more absurd it all seemed. My hair went grey, fell out, my

skin wrinkled and I wanted to curse God, or my own vanity or whatever, for daring to believe in a stupid promise. I started to think I only believed in it because I'd always wanted to be special. Different.

That's the thing about promises. They won't let you go. And so I started coming to the Temple more often. The Temple. Herod's folly. As if God were more here than among the lepers at the city gates or out by the banks of the Jordan.

But I could get here. I thought, if the Messiah is ever to come, surely he'll come to the City. Surely he'll come to make sacrifice at the Temple. Or tear it down for the vanity it is.

For years, nothing. I saw all the candidates. The preachers and revolutionaries. The down-at-heel princelings. The sheep in wolf's clothing. The criminals pulling a trick. The men who offer promises and get nailed up the next day.

And then a pair of peasants entered the courts with a baby. A pair of nobodies, the woman clutching a wriggling bundle in her arms. And I knew.

You see couples like that every day. Harassed. A bit uncertain. Embarrassed by the fact they can't afford the proper



sacrifice. But there was something different about them.

There was no halo of light. No band of angels hidden to ordinary eyes. There was shock and sleeplessness and exhaustion, all the things parents of newborns have. I knew that look. But there was more.

Maybe it was the way the woman held herself. The surety. The steeliness. The sense she was carrying something more precious than gold or even a firstborn. I felt a fool when I asked if I could hold the child in my arms.



Did I see anything special? He was quite scrawny. Typical kid of a typically underfed girl. There was no special twinkle in the eyes. He didn't show abilities beyond his years. He didn't raise his week-old hand to bless me.

He cried. And I felt the warmth of his tiny body. I felt how precious this newborn was. I felt like I was holding the promise I had received. And I cried too.

I felt like I was holding the one who would carry the promise, for us all, of good news for the poor and despised and unimportant.

I can now go in peace. He carries the

terrible, wonderful promise now.

Part of me wishes he didn't. Promises are guarantees. And the good news he carries will take everything he has. It will take everything from his mother too.

But I have been faithful. I can die. I can take my last breath and taste the promise. And know it's good.

ANNA Luke 2:36-38

When I saw the couple with their baby, stood next to Simeon, I pitied them. There is something so defenceless about the young.

I saw them and I saw every last bit of brittleness. I saw the mother – barely



more than a girl – pretending she knew what she was doing. Standing there as if she wasn't totally out of her depth. As if her breasts weren't heavy and sore from nursing. As if she wasn't a mother for the first time. I saw the father – older, but no less bewildered. As if he couldn't quite believe he was the father.

Simeon – hunched and white-haired – made them both look like bemused children. He does that to everyone.

Except me. I'm older than all of them. I live in the Temple courts. I've seen revolution and compromise. I've seen a