



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Fifth Sunday After The Epiphany, February 6th, 2017
*Being the commemoration of the Feast of the Presentation of Christ at the Temple,
 commonly called, Candlemas or the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

It shouldn't be altogether surprising that there were relatively few intellectuals among Jesus' disciples. People who consider themselves intellectuals are often remarkably slow to catch on. Marxism, for example, is reviled as an abject failure politically, economically and socially virtually everywhere except the faculty lounges of America's universities.

The Three Wise Men are remarkable in that they were intellectuals who were able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah – unlike the doctors of theology who met Jesus a dozen or so years later in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Here was an 11 or 12-year-old boy who spent two days running intellectual rings around the brightest theological minds in Judea, yet not one of them said: "Give the kid a scholarship to the best Yeshiva in town."

Instead, they breathed a collective sigh of relief when his parents turn up to cart him back to the boondocks.

The remarkable obtuseness of so many intellectuals helps us understand why a majority of the people who welcomed the Messiah were relatively uneducated. Often the Ordinary Joe holds fewer of the preconceived opinions that prevent him from perceiving the obvious.

In today's reading from St. Luke's Gospel we encounter two people whose sheer ordinariness enabled them to do something extraordinary: They

were able to recognize the infant son of an apparently ordinary couple from Galilee as the Savior of the World. And they did so without angel choirs or the appearance of bright stars.

One was Anna, an 84-year-old who had been widowed for at least 60 years; the other was an elderly man named Simeon. Luke tells us Anna was a prophetess, who stayed in the Temple precincts, serving God night and day with prayer and fasting.

As for Simeon, the Holy Ghost had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen at first hand God's Messiah. And the song he was inspired to compose about the event has become one of the Church's best-loved canticles. It is commonly known by its opening words in Latin *Nunc dimittis*. "O Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . ."

Luke doesn't explain to us how these two people were able to recognize the infant Jesus as the "Consolation of Israel." Certainly it wasn't by following fashionable contemporary assumptions. A vast majority of Jews, from low brows to intellectuals, were firmly convinced the Messiah would be a warrior king cast in the mold of King David.

Simeon and Anna, however, were able to recognize that God does things his way, and not necessarily the way we like him to do things. It

was an insight that can only have been bestowed upon them by the Holy Ghost – an insight that came about thanks to their cultivation of a “childlike faith.” As Jesus tells us: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

The word “childlike” should not be confused with “childish.” A childlike faith, first and foremost, is an acute awareness our place in the universe *vis a’ vis* that of God. In this, they had every much more in common with the great King David than their fellow Judeans would have realized.

David – for all his majesty and worldly glory – had the same childlike faith as Anna and Simeon. And it was this quality that made David so beloved of God – so beloved in fact that God promised one of his direct descendants would “build a house in my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” It was a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

A study of David’s life demonstrates he most certainly was not perfect. Far from it. Some of David's sins were truly horrific – his adulterous affair with Bathsheba: To cover up this sin, he sent Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband, to his death in battle, sacrificing one his most loyal followers to spare himself a bit of embarrassment.

Admittedly, David was courageous, but he was no braver than Saul. But while Saul was ruthless and cruel, David was merciful. He readily spared Saul's life, knowing Saul would never have accorded him the same mercy.

Even so, David's physical courage and natural sense of mercy, though entirely commendable, were not the qualities that especially commended him to God. Many Old Testament heroes were just as brave and just as kindhearted.

The fact of the matter is that God esteemed David for the virtue that’s the natural product of a childlike faith – a virtue that sounds quite the opposite of bravery: It is called humility. For all his courage, for all of his popularity and worldly success, David was remarkably humble in his relationship with God. He always acutely aware that what he had achieved in this world was solely owed to God's grace.

This humility gave him a down-to-earth

understanding of the vastness of the gulf between himself, a mere human being, and God – an understanding that expressed itself in a heartfelt sense of contrition for his sins, and a cast iron faith in God's goodness and mercy.

One can see this in the Psalms he composed: (*Psalms 6 & 7*) "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine indignation, neither chasten me in thy displeasure." And "O Lord my God, in thee have I put my trust: save me from them that persecute me, and deliver me."

But beyond his unshakable faith, his contrition, and his humility, David’s uniquely close relationship with God was founded the fact that he, freely and unreservedly, acknowledged God to be his Sovereign Lord and King. (*Psalms 8*) "O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world!"

Many people hail God as their Lord and King, but few of them mean it in anything more than an abstract sense. David, however, hailed God as his actual Lord and King in every respect. God commanded not just David's spiritual life, but his earthly actions as well. David held himself utterly and completely accountable to God and he was bitterly aware of how greatly he fell short.

The fundamental principle of God's Covenant with the children of Israel was the institution of God as both their earthly and heavenly Lord and King. It was the premise upon which the whole relationship was based. Thus, in demanding the Prophet Samuel, the last of the Judges, give them a human king, the Israelites were committing an act of treason – rebelling against their ruler. God was their King both in heaven and earth.

David was Israel's greatest king because his unreserved acknowledgment of God as his own king put an end – at least temporarily – to this rebellion. It restored Israel's covenant with God.

Christians are the new Israel, which means we, just like the Israelites of old, need to acknowledge God as our sovereign Lord and King. Like David, God doesn't expect us to be perfect. After all, he is our creator and he knows our faults and flaws too well for that. But he does expect us to have a heartfelt sense of contrition for the things we do wrong, and develop the childlike faith that enables us to

accept his forgiveness. *AMEN.*

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory
and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now
and Forever. AMEN***