*Almighty and Everlasting God,*

*we humbly beseech Thy Majesty*

*that as Thy only begotten Son was this day*

*presented in the temple in the substance of our flesh,*

*so too Thou wouldst grant us*

*to be presented unto Thee with purified souls*

*and bring us into your presence.*

*Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen*

And a happy feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple to you! Some years ago, I was meeting with some colleagues and dreaming up some more ways for our parish children to get involved in the liturgy and make some memories at worship. The old tradition of a Candlemas procession came up quickly, because it offered us a chance to help the kiddos relate to Jesus' own early life and also offered a chance to give them fire (with plenty of supervision of course). Here at St. John's, we actually have an entire window devoted to the Presentation and we can enjoy many of the details of today's Gospel lesson within the beautiful composition of the stained glass. I hope you'll take a minute to enjoy the window soon, and I'll make sure that there's a picture posted for those at home.

One of the most prominent details of the window is part of the text of the famous song of Simeon we read this morning, the song we often call the *Nunc Dimitti*s. In many ways, this beautiful little poem is at the heart of the story of Jesus' Presentation as it reflects the explicit hope of the people of Israel who were awaiting the coming of the Messiah. Luke described Simeon himself very simply: he was pious, devout, and as such was looking forward to the time when God would finally relieve Israel of her oppression. Luke also made it very clear that God's Holy Spirit was with Simeon, making a point to include that the Holy Spirit was on Simeon, that the Spirit offered Simeon a point of revelation about his seeing the Messiah, and that the Spirit guided him to the temple to meet Jesus and his family. Luke very much wants us to pay attention to what is happening here; as if we have been attentive to even the first couple of chapters of his Gospel, he is already using several of his favorite tools to highlight the message that Simeon offered that fateful day at the temple.

And if you've ever heard some of the beautiful settings of the *Nunc Dimittis* that we've offered as part of Evensong, you will notice that many composers set some of the most stirring music to the section of the text wherein Simeon proclaims that the messiah will be a light to lighten the Gentiles. Luke was doing much the same thing. This was not the message that many of his contemporaries would be waiting for: for them, the Messiah wouldn't so much be a light to the Gentiles as a punch in their face to get them off Israel's lawn. But Luke dialed into Simeon's song to show us that the Messiah's salvation would go well beyond the boundaries of the people of Israel. Luke wanted us to be on the lookout for the fact that Jesus' salvation would be on offer to everyone, including the gentiles, but that they would be his disciples.

Luke, in a sense, is showing us how to read the rest of his Gospel text. Here's a shameless plug for our Luke study, but you'll get a feel for how to read his entire book by paying close attention to the first three chapters, especially this wonderful episode we read this morning. But beyond showing us how to read his text, Luke also reveals some things about our life in Christ. We, just like Simeon, have the Spirit upon us as we ourselves await the Messiah in our lives. Each one of us who has come to know the presence of Jesus, has done so by the work of the Holy Spirit working before us and in us. And the Spirit has guided each one of us to meet Jesus, just as Simeon did at the Temple all those years ago. This morning, we have several guests in the form of scouts and their leaders. Consider well that they have been guided here and we pray that they will meet Jesus in our hospitality.

But also, a family has been guided to the font of baptism, presenting themselves to become full participants in the ministry of the Church. By water and the Spirit, they will be bonded to Christ and his bride, and sealed as his own forever. They will join us in the great project to lighten all peoples with the glory of Israel's Messiah, the King who deigns to be among us in our time together on Sundays, and even finds room enough within our hearts, helping us in our ministries beyond the Sunday morning hours.

So, dear ones, let us depart from our worship this day with the peace of a God and in accordance with His Word of Life. We who have beheld the savior by the mystery of the word made flesh, present to us by the power of the Holy Spirit, I pray that we would draw the whole world to Him by the same power. Let us follow the examples of our light bearing children, and the scouts whose virtues reflect God’s goodness to a heavy-hearted world. Let us be lights to the nations as we remember our baptismal creed and covenant. My friends, keep the Candles lit, and may all people know the good news of the Glory of God’s people, Jesus Christ.

To Him be all Glory. From age to age. Amen.