

Today's feast offers us a beautiful reflection on humility. I think it helps to know a little history. So, come back with me 4000 years ago.

That's when Abraham entered the Promised Land and God tested his faith by asking him to slay his son Isaac. Abraham, a model of obedience, took his son up to a high windy rock, built an altar, and proceeded to offer a sacrifice to God. You know this story: an angel spared Isaac and provided a ram instead.

Later Isaac's grandchildren migrated south, but the Egyptians put them in slavery. Moses led the people to freedom, and on the road back to the Promised Land he received the Law from God on Mount Sinai. Actually, he got much more than ten commandments. He got hundreds of them. And among the commandments was the instruction that a woman, forty days after giving birth to a son, should make an offering in the holy tent the Israelites carried with them in the desert. If she was poor, she offered two pigeons or turtle-doves, one to thank God for her child, the other in sorrow for her sins.

~~A thousand years~~<sup>herodias</sup> later, after the Israelites had settled in the Promised Land, they decided to build a better home for the ark of the covenant than that makeshift tent they carried around the desert. King David took an army up a high rock and captured back the traditional site where Abraham offered that ram in sacrifice. The winds still prevailed up there so people had been using the site as a threshing floor. That is, after harvesting the wheat, they would throw it up in the air here, and the wind would separate the lighter wheat from the heavier chaff.

David died, and his son, Solomon, erected a temple on this spot. Now, forty days after a poor Jewish woman anywhere in the Promised Land gave birth to a son, she grabbed two pigeons, traveled to Jerusalem, David's city, and made her offering there.

500 years later the Assyrians captured Jerusalem, took the people into captivity to Babylon, and destroyed that beautiful temple. When the people were set free, they rebuilt their temple, and we think it looked like this (3853).

A few hundred years later Jesus was born. On the eighth day his parents took him here to be circumcised. On the 40th day they came back so Mary could bring her two pigeons. That's today, forty days after Christmas. This temple is the same place where Jesus got lost at the age of twelve, where the devil took him when he tempted Jesus in the desert, where Jesus pulled out a whip to drive moneychangers away, and the place he predicted would be destroyed after his death. That happened in the year 70 A.D. This is all that's left (3905), what they call the Western Wall, or more popularly, the Wailing Wall.

What strikes me about this feast is that neither Mary nor Jesus had to do this. Mary had no need to make a sin offering; she had no sin. Jesus had no need to submit to the law; he was God. But they did it, they both did it out of humility.

~~We light candles on this feast~~ because when Simeon saw Jesus enter the temple, he recognized him as the light of the world. So our candles recognize Christ as the light of our church. When we bring our blessed candles home they will stay there to remind us about Christ, who humbled himself for the sake of others, even when he didn't have to do it.

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On this feast, <sup>thanks to God</sup> we no longer bring pigeons to church. We bring candles.