



The Presentation of Christ in the Temple
February 2, 2020
Annual Meeting Sunday
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+O God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

He wore a jersey with the number '24' on it. He was said to be "ruthless, relentless and remarkable". (NBC News, 01.27.20) He was a star of stars, perhaps a mini-constellation wrapped in one talented person. He was a family man, a loving and caring husband and father of several girls. Who can forget that award-winning smile especially when pictured with his family? Tributes poured in from around the nation at his sudden and untimely death last Sunday morning. Kobe Bryant and eight others including one of his children lost their lives last Sunday.

Why begin today's message with recounting this tragic event on this Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and Annual Meeting Sunday, a day of looking back while looking forward in 2020? This past week, news reporters looked back on a life well-lived and filled with promise especially for young people.

Looking back and looking forward inform our lives. Learning from the past, living consciously in the moment and hoping to live well into the future are aspects of our lives at home, at work, at school, at play and here at St. Mark's.

At today's Annual Meeting, we will give thanks for the past year, the many successes of the year including the Stewardship Season, and those 'other' times when some of us were challenged to see ourselves as others see us and to learn more about ourselves and those around us. We will gather as a sign of unity, parishioners in support of the mission to which we are called as the Body of Christ at St. Mark's.

No matter what happens in life, the joys and the sadness in life, we are called to be united with God in Jesus. We believe that God is our companion on life's road and cannot abandon us. It is not in God's nature to abandon God's own creation. Like a parent and a child, there is an unbreakable bond between God and God's creatures. Just think about Jennifer and Lydia Bedford, their daughter, Ellis, and there adorable little one! Unbreakable bonds of love!

Here, we gather to give God thanks and praise for the love which is ours in Jesus. During the Season of Epiphany, we believe that God continues to reveal God's self in Jesus and in our life together.

The Feast we celebrate today dates back to the Fourth Century in Jerusalem, a day in the life of baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph. It is The Presentation of Christ in the Temple on the fortieth day after his birth.

Along with the encounter of Simeon and Anna at Christ's presentation, the event also had to do with the purification of Mary. Jewish law required that the family go to the Temple to present the first-born child and for ritual purification of the mother following birth. (Luke 2:22-38 and <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Candlemas>)

Tradition has developed that today can also be celebrated as Candlemas Day, a day to bless candles. The blessing of candles is linked to the words of Simeon that Jesus is the “light for revelation” to all people. (www.learnreligions.com)

Though we are not blessing candles, there are many candles in the Sanctuary to symbolize Jesus as the ‘light’ of the world. The Paschal Candle is the primary liturgical symbol of the light of Christ, blessed at the Easter Vigil and then used at various times during the liturgical year.

Ever wonder about the childhood of Jesus, his youth and early adulthood about which the Scriptures tell us very little? The Gospels tell us much about his public ministry after his Baptism and retreat to the desert. I think of the successes Jesus had in calling the first disciples, and I wonder about times of frustration and even failure.

If twelve recruits said “yes” to the call to follow Jesus, were there others who said “no” to his invitation to follow? Would we have said “yes”? Today’s Annual Meeting is an opportunity to say “yes” to the strength of this community knit together, a community which continues to gather week after week to give God thanks and praise.

In my Children’s Message last Sunday at the 10:30 Service, I held up two cards. The first card said “yes”. The second card said “no”. We played a round of ‘Simon says’ to engage the children in what it means to say “yes” to a parent, loved one or teacher and “yes” to following Jesus. Jesus, not physically present, the last question got mixed reviews!

Today, we say “yes” to follow Jesus as best we can. We give thanks for the gift of the Church, the Anglican Tradition, St. Mark’s and our life together.

In this ‘super bowl’ of church meetings, the Annual Meeting will enable us to receive ministry reports, vote on the nominees for Vestry, be presented with the Treasurer and Delegates to the Diocesan Convention and review the budget for 2020. We will eat together. Episcopalians love to eat together!

Those able to vote will exercise a kind of democratic authority, a hallmark of our Tradition. Why go to all this trouble? Well, the Canons of the Church call us to assemble as overseers and supporters of what we do at St. Mark’s.

Our Tradition also calls us to be the Beloved Community of Jesus. We are called to “do justice, love mercy and walk humbly” with God as the Prophet Micah reminds us. Join me in reflecting on how to better orient life and commit to Jesus in more meaningful ways. What might that look like to you and to me?

May we be “ruthless” in our attempts to be people of justice, mercy and love, “relentless” in following Jesus, and “remarkable” as Christians living the Gospel! How successful we are may have to do with how well we let go of some things in life in order to embrace Jesus and his Way of Love.

As we strive to walk as Jesus walked, God’s grace is with us. Let us put that grace to work, do ‘good’ and make life more meaningful for us and all those we encounter in life. Amen.