

Presentation of Christ

28th Jan 17

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Place: St Mary's Evensong

Theme: The Temple in Jesus Ministry

- ◆ As we celebrate the presentation of Christ in the Temple today it is a good opportunity to reflect on the place of the temple in Jesus ministry. The temple is a recurring theme in his ministry, but it's significance for Jesus is ambiguous.
- ◆ For Jews of Jesus time the Temple was the meeting place between God and his people. They believed that God was everywhere, but that the temple and the holy of holies was the holiest place on Earth, where God could be met with face to face.
- ◆ Jesus presentation at the temple at 40 days old is a reminder to us that he is born into an orthodox Jewish family who will bring him up to be a practising Jew. From this point onwards, the temple is one of the central themes in Jesus's ministry.
- ◆ The significance of the temple in Jesus ministry and mission is complex. It is a place of exclusion; the gentiles are not allowed beyond a certain point within the temple precincts. In the light of this it is fascinating that Luke chooses to tell us that Jesus message is for all people within the walls of the temple. Matthew shows Jesus significance for the whole world through the presence of

the magi at the nativity. They represent the good news that is going to come to the whole world. Luke conveys the same message very differently. In the Nunc Dimittis, Simeon prophesies within the temple walls that Jesus will be the light to lighten the gentiles as well as being the glory of Israel. It is a deeply subversive prophesy to give in the temple.

- ◆ More positively Luke has Jesus calling the temple his father's house on two occasions. For those of us reading the gospel as Christians there is an irony here. Any pious Jew might call the temple his father's house, but as Christians we know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and therefor more is meant by calling God his father.
- ◆ This comes across very powerfully the first time Jesus uses the expression 'My Father's house' in Luke's Gospel. The twelve year old Jesus is found in the temple after an anxious search by his parents and says 'did you not know I was bound to be in my father's house.' Luke 2.49
- ◆ Then in the cleansing of the temple he accuses the traders and money changers of 'Making my fathers house into a den of thieves., Again there is ambiguity about the temple and its place. The temple is not just the Fathers house. It is the den of thieves. The temple is also the place of temptation. Satan

takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple for the third temptation. Subtly suggesting the temptations to corruption of worldly power for those who are spiritually powerful.

Something we later see demonstrated by the High Priests during the passion when they condemn Jesus to die ‘because it is expedient that one man should die for the people.’

- ◆ As his ministry develops rather than admiring the fine architecture of the temple when it is drawn to his attention he prophesies its destruction. Mtt 24.1-, Lk 21.5-6. When he discusses worship with the woman at the well he looks forward to a time when worship will no longer be focussed on the temple and characterised by where it happens; but it will be characterised by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The time is coming when true worshippers will ‘worship him in spirit and in truth’. John 4.24
- ◆ Jesus taught in the temple every day during his ministry in Jerusalem, yet one of the accusations made against him at his trial was that he had prophesied the destruction of the temple. This is clearly true as several of the gospel writers record the prophecy before the trial.
- ◆ The most intriguing of these is the version that is recorded by John which we had in our second reading this evening. ‘Destroy this

temple and in three days'. John tells that in fact he was not talking about the temple building, but the temple of his body.

- ◆ Christ, we are meant to understand is the true temple. He is the place where we most truly meet with the living God and he is for both Jew and Gentile.
- ◆ In the book of Hebrews the writer wants us to understand that Jesus is both the fulfilment of the temple and its replacement. By his sacrifice of himself on the Cross he puts an end to the need for sacrifice once and for all.
- ◆ As we reflect on all this and its significance for our faith we need to remember that we the church are the body of Christ. We are therefore the successor of the temple. We need to remember that as we gather we need to be a place that enables people to meet with God. We need to be the fulfilment of that prophecy made to the woman at the well. We need to worship in spirit and in truth.