

## **Sermon Transcript**

**The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber**

**The Feast of the Presentation of Jesus Christ in the Temple**

**February 2nd, 2025**

What more fitting day could we have asked for for Ellie's baptism? Today is the feast of the presentation of Jesus. We hear in today's Gospel reading that Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, go to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer thanks for their new baby and to get a blessing. Jesus gets his first visit to this holy site, a place of pilgrimage, a place of special connection and community for all Jews in Jesus' time.

And this is what will happen to Ellie in our service today. We will bless her with water and oil. All of us, the whole congregation, will say special prayers over her. And we will do this in a place of special connection and community for Ellie and her family. Ellie's mother Emily and aunt Anna were baptized in this very place some years ago. They grew up here and were part of the fabric of worship and singing and activity at St Martin's. Their mother, Ellie's grandmother, Martha, was deeply involved in this community for years.

Baptism is about belonging. Belonging to God, belonging to the community of Jesus followers, and belonging to this community of St Martin's. Clearly, Ellie already has deep connections to St Martin's, but today we will seal that connection forever.

Baptism is about belovedness. Through baptism we are reminded of something that has always been true for us, that we were made by God, and God loves us. We need to be reminded of this, pretty much all the time, and so it is good that Ellie's family has brought her here today, to be affirmed in her belovedness, and to remind all the rest of us too.

Because God made us, and because God loves us, we make promises to God in baptism. Five promises, and they are big ones.

To pray together. To do our best, and when we fall short, to get back on track. To tell the good news about Jesus.

The last two vows we make on Ellie's behalf today are really big ones.

To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself. To strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

We promise to do these big things when we become a follower of Jesus. Ellie's parents and sponsors will promise to help Ellie learn to do these big things. We do them through actions big and small.

And it's a feedback loop, where we practice our love of God by praying, and telling the good news, and loving each other, and doing justice, and it helps grow our sense that we belong, it helps us grow in awareness of how we are the beloved of God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gets blessings from Simeon and Anna, two prophets in the Temple. Jesus is destined to be great, to be a light for all people.

But Simeon's blessing is a little mixed. Jesus will be opposed -- he will face big conflicts in his life. And his mother Mary will be hurt as a result -- a sword will pierce her soul.

We are not Jesus. But in our baptism we are born into a new life in Christ, and that blessing, just like Simeon's blessing to Jesus and his family, comes with challenges, even pain.

When we choose to pray boldly, when we love fiercely, when we stand up for justice, we can expect that sometimes we will be opposed. When we love others like a mother loves her child, we can expect that a sword will eventually pierce our soul too.

This week has been full of tragedy. Plane crashes in Washington and North Philadelphia. The solemn 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. And there are sadnesses close to home for some of us as well. Celebrations like this are bound to bring up grief over the ones who should be here, but are not.

We hurt, because we care. We hurt, because we have loved.

This is why we need baptism. This is why we come here to be with other Jesus-followers. This is why we need a spiritual home like St Martin's.

To remind us that the communion of saints, the loved ones who have gone on, are still here, that we are still connected to them through bread and water and spirit.

This is why we need baptism. To remind us that we are deeply, deeply loved, that we belong. This is how we get the strength to love through the sadness and pain. This is how we get the strength to stand up for the vulnerable, to stand up for justice.

We belong. We are loved. We are witnesses to these truths, today, for each other and for Ellie. Eleanor Marthe, welcome to the community of Jesus-followers. Welcome to St Martin's. Amen.