



My Beloved Ones,

Today we have been given an opportunity to look behind us, to Christmas, and ahead, to Great Lent, as we consider the patience of Simeon, and of the Lord's Mother.

February 2nd, 40 days after Christmas, marks The Presentation of Our Lord and Savior in the Temple. Mary and Joseph, being devout Jews, remembered the Lord's Commandment that the first-born son was to be taken to the Temple 40 days after His birth, and dedicated to God. In order for this dedication to take place, the parents were expected to make a sacrifice. If they were wealthy, they were to offer a lamb, a pigeon or a young turtledove. However, as His guardian and Mother were poor, they offered the option of two turtledoves.

When Joseph and Mary arrived with the young Jesus, they were met by Simeon, a holy elder, as well as the Prophetess Anna. Simeon was a learned man, who spent many years in deep study of the Scriptures. Having read and considered the prophecies, Simeon prayed to God to send the Messiah so that Israel might be delivered from

their oppressors. After many years of prayer, God declared to Simeon that his heart's desire had been granted: Simeon would not die until he had seen God's Christ.

Therefore, when Mary and Joseph arrived seeking the elder's blessing, Simeon was overcome with emotion, and he took the Child in his arms, saying the prayer which we recite at the end of every Vespers: *"Lord, now let Your servant go in peace according to Your promise, because my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory to your people Israel."* (Luke 2:29-32)

To suddenly reflect on our Lord's infancy, may seem strange; but this feast, which in some ways finally brings Christmas to a close, does not allow us to lose sight of the purpose of the Incarnation. After his prayer of gratitude, Simeon turns to our Lord's Mother, and is inspired to prophesy, *"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."* (Luke 2:34-35). In His divine mission to open the hearts of men, Our Lord will not be accepted by all people, governments, and authorities. He will be condemned, denied, and crucified—and as Simeon says, Mary will not be spared the pain of these events.

I pray that we can take several things as we consider the meaning of this feast. The first, is that if our Ever-Virgin Mary can accept God's own will, and the painful reactions mankind will have, with how much more patience should we greet events in our own lives? Secondly, Simeon was content to wait for years; even before God's promise to him. The Prophetess Anna had lived in the Temple for many years, awaiting such a moment to declare to all the people. They did not despair. They studied, fasted, praying and trusting that God would hear them and their deep prayers. May we all do likewise today, through Great Lent, and forever.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta