

## **Sung Eucharist for the Presentation of Christ with Baptism of Lucas Beasley 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2013**

**Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40**

**Caroline Yandell**

Chippie THE PARAKEET had no idea what was about to hit him. One minute he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean his cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "ssssopp!" Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie -- still alive, but stunned.

Now, the bird was covered with dust and soot, so she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the shower, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore -- he just sits and stares." It's not hard to see why - Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . That's enough to steal the song from any heart.<sup>1</sup>

Now I'm not suggesting that we've been knocked off our perches in quite the same way but I think probably most of us have known times when we have suddenly been thrown from relative calm and contentment into very testing times. When something unexpected has happened – perhaps receiving a redundancy letter, or the doctor calls or a policeman knocks on the door, or something else cuts in to disturb our peace and we are thrown into a dark place, full of doubts, doused with the cold water of reality and assaulted by what can feel like the hot air of empty promises. Or perhaps our difficulties have come on more gradually, a build up of problems and of stress and unhappiness, sickness perhaps or worry over finances or a loved one. To a lesser or greater extent, we all go through testing times.

But unlike Chippie, we have a wise and loving God and although our trials may be tough and long, they come with the promise that we need not face them alone. We have a God who understands our every struggle and test.

Our reading from Hebrews reminds us that Jesus knows about our suffering. In him we do not have a high priest who was unlike us, but a man, a person like you and me. He shared flesh and blood with us, becoming like us in every way. Because he didn't come in order to help angels, the writer to the Hebrews tells us, but to help the children of Abraham (and that includes us!) He was himself tested in every way – he was misunderstood, abused, wrongly accused, and abandoned by his friends, spat upon, beaten and brutally and cruelly crucified. He knows what it is like to face the toughest of human conditions.

Jesus did not set himself above our outside of our daily lives and their demands. Nor did he set himself beyond the traditions and laws of his own people. And so today in our Gospel we come to the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

The Old Testament Law (in Leviticus Chapter 12) required that a Jewish woman who gave birth to a son should, forty days after the birth, go to Jerusalem and offer two sacrifices in the temple for the purpose of purification. And in the case of a firstborn son there was also a requirement (from Exodus 13) that the

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<sup>1</sup> From Max Lucado, *'In the Eye of the Storm'*

child be dedicated to God, and acknowledged as belonging to God in a special way. This was now what Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to do.

And so it's very appropriate that we are baptising Lucas today – that Lisa and Ben have brought Lucas here to do something very special in the eyes of God, to do it for him and on his behalf until he is old enough to make promises for himself.

Jesus grew up in a family that loved God and wanted to obey his Law. No fewer than five times in this text Luke tells us that they did everything required by the Law. Later in life there would be times when Jesus would disagree with some of the Scribes and Pharisees who interpreted the Law, but he was not an outsider looking in. But this ceremony in the Temple is no ordinary ceremony, this Jesus is no ordinary child – and into the story come Simeon and Anna, two godly faithful elderly saints, who recognise that something wonderful has begun to unfold.

Simeon is introduced as a man on whom the Spirit of God rests and to whom the Spirit has revealed that the Messiah would be born in his lifetime. When Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple, Simeon is brought there too by an impulse of the Holy Spirit. It is God who brings the meeting about. Simeon is a man close to God and that's why he is able to recognise Jesus. And taking the child in his arms this old priest speaks to God, blessing him and expressing his realisation that God is now dismissing him from his duty of watching for the arrival of the Messiah. Simeon's duty is done. The great day has come. But now Simeon turns to the parents. He blesses them but as he speaks, especially to Mary, there is a more sombre tone. There is a hint of the testing and difficult times that Jesus will face. And Mary's coming experience will mirror that of her son – a sword will pass through her soul (she will suffer the loss of her son in death) because the opposition to Jesus will reach such a pitch that by the hands of his opponents a sword will pass through his soul (he will be put to death).

Mary will face testing times. But it is Jesus who will be tested in every way, tested beyond the limits of what any one of us could bear. As Hebrews says, 'Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested'. He knows and understands every trial and struggle that we face. But it's not just identifying with us and understanding – we actually need a bit more than that.

In John's Gospel we hear Jesus praying to the Father on our account – not that we will be taken out of the world and all its problems, but that we will be given strength to face our difficulties. And it is for that purpose that Jesus has given us his Holy Spirit, our counsellor, and guide, our comforter and our strength.

We will be baptising Lucas in a few moments. And it is in our Baptism that we receive the Holy Spirit. And I will pray for Lucas as he is baptised that he will daily be renewed by the Holy Spirit. We have a Saviour who not only understands all our testing and trials but, by His Spirit, offers to be with us and to help us in all that we face.

This date in the Church calendar also has another name and meaning – and that's Candlemas. Traditionally, it was the day when all the candles that would be used in church in the coming year were brought to be blessed. Hence, the Mass of the Candles. And although with electricity we no longer depend on candles in order to see, we still do attach symbolic significance to them. We light the Baptism Candle as a reminder that Jesus is the Light of the World, the one who comes into the darkness to bring light. The one who comes into our testing times to bring hope and to bring help. We will be giving Lucas a lighted candle as a reminder that he has received the Light of Christ and that he, with all of us, is being commissioned to take that light out into all the world. And that he, with each of us, can know the Light of Christ in everything we face. There is no darkness so dark, there is no trial so hard, no test so difficult, that the light of Christ cannot overcome it.