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# This Child Has Been Sent by God

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*Text: Luke 2:22-40 (The Presentation of Our Lord)*

Who would have thought it...

that she, a poor girl from Nazareth  
would be taking her child to the temple in Jerusalem  
to be dedicated?

The time for her purification was finally complete.  
At last she and Joseph could begin their journey home.

Home to Nazareth—  
home to her family and her mother.

She was happy the child had been a boy.  
The period of purification after the birth of a boy  
was only six weeks;  
if the child had been a girl it would have been three months  
before she could resume  
the normal daily routine of her life.

Mary had wondered about this puzzling difference;  
but it had always been so—  
for as long as anyone could remember  
it had been the custom of her people.

Just as it was the custom  
to take the first-born boy  
to the Temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated to the  
Lord.

Of course women from distant places like Nazareth  
could only dream of such things—  
it was just too far away.

If it hadn't been for the Romans and their stupid census—  
Mary smiled, maybe she should be grateful to the Romans;  
after all, if it hadn't been for that edict of Caesar  
she and Joseph would never have made the trek to  
Bethlehem.

And she wouldn't be preparing to take her child to Jerusalem—  
to the temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated!

For a moment she dreamed she was Hannah.

But there was an important difference.

Hannah had left her son in the care of the old priest,  
while Mary's child had been entrusted to her care.

She would take her child home to Nazareth,  
home to the loving care of her family and of her mother.  
She missed her mother.

That had been the worst part of this journey:  
not having her mother with her when the child was  
born.

But soon she would be home!

And what a story she would have to tell—  
and there would be more, she could feel it.

At the temple, surely at the temple  
there would be a word of blessing to remember  
and to add to the story.

They were both excited as they made their way into the city.  
Jerusalem was much larger than Nazareth,  
but they had no trouble finding the temple.  
Mary had never seen such an enormous building.

And they needn't have worried about finding their way around.

Hardly were they through the gates than someone directed them

to the table of the seller of birds.

Everyone seemed to know just why they were there  
and what they would want.

She supposed because she was carrying a baby in her arms,  
it was obvious that they had come for a dedication.

And their poor clothing was an indication  
they would be wanting

the least expensive sacrifice:

a pair of pigeons.

Someone else pointed the way into the temple.

A temple functionary met them,

took their offering,

mumbled the appropriate liturgical formula—

and it was over—and they found themselves on the temple  
steps.

It was not what she had expected.

She had so looked forward to this moment

and it had been so flat—so matter-of-fact—so routine.

And she supposed it was—for them,

they did this sort of thing all the time;

didn't they know how important this day was for her?

There had been no word—no memorable word for her journey.

Well, there was nothing to do now but to head home,

home to Nazareth, to her family and her mother.

The old man was frail.

The arms he held out for the child were wrinkled and  
scrawny.

Should she give him the child?

Surely those fragile arms could not bear even so small a

load.

They were both amazed by his strength as he held the child aloft;

and the voice they heard was steady and strong:

“Lord, now your servant is ready to go in peace.

For with my own eyes, I have seen

the salvation you have prepared for all people.

A light to lighten the Gentiles,

and the glory of your people Israel.”

Mary’s heart almost burst. Yes! Yes!

This was what she had wanted to hear!

What wonderful words! Words of power and promise!

There was something comfortably familiar about them;

She had heard them before—from the angel!

Or had it been in a dream?

At last! She could go home now—strengthened—assured.

These were words to remember, to treasure.

These were words for the journey home to Nazareth  
and beyond!

But as he gave her back the child

the old man’s face clouded.

He looked at her sadly.

“This child has been sent by God

for the salvation—and the destruction—

of many in Israel.

There are many who will speak out against him.

And sorrow, like a sword, will pierce your heart.”

No! No! She did not want to hear this!

Not these words!

Not words of destruction and death and sorrow and pain!

Hadn’t there been enough pain?

The pain of hearing the snickers behind her back;

The pain of not knowing if Joseph would stand by her;  
The pain of having her baby so far away from home,  
far from her mother's strong arms and gentle hands.

So... there would be no word for her after all.

As she drew her cloak around the child  
and started down the temple steps  
she felt a hand on her arm.  
She had no idea who the old woman was,  
but the arm that encircled her shoulders was strong  
and the hand that gently stroked her face  
and cradled the head of her child  
was a hand of blessing.

Had the old woman spoken? Mary wasn't sure,  
but she thought she had heard her whisper—  
or was it sigh?—  
“Emmanuel” before she walked away into the crowd.

As Mary and Joseph turned toward the temple gate  
they heard a voice ringing out over the throng.  
It was the old woman and she was proclaiming  
to all who would hear:  
“The Lord has come among us to set us free!  
I have seen the child!  
God is with us!  
EMMANUEL!! EMMANUEL!!”

At last! She had a word for the journey!

Amen.