

# Avedis

## Աւետիս • The Good News

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### THE PRESENTATION

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,*

*"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;*

*which thou has prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to thy people Israel,"*

*And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel.*

*Luke 2:25-32, 36-38 (RSV)*

Forty days after Jesus' birth, according to the custom of the time, the infant was taken by his parents to the Temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated to God. This event had been awaited by generations; 700 years had passed since Isaiah prophesied that "...a young woman shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (7:14.) Now the fulfillment of these words came to one Simeon, and one Anna, two righteous souls whose lives had been lived in expectation of this event. Luke is the only evangelist who recorded this event, suggesting that he probably heard the story from St. Mary herself, after the Ascension of our Lord.

Jesus was brought to the Temple in observance of the Law. He was no doubt, an aged man. *Righteous and devout* describe Simeon, and give him credibility and authority. *The consolation of Israel* which Simeon had been awaiting was the salvation the Messiah was to bring, the fulfillment of messianic hopes. God the Holy Spirit had made Simeon a promise, a sign that he was already at work saving his people. Simeon knew that

God's promises are always fulfilled; do we live with the same confidence in him in our own age? The *Lord's Christ* is a Jewish title which means God's Anointed One.

Simeon was inspired to come into the Temple at the right moment. When Jesus' parents *brought in the child Jesus*, the prophecy that he should live to see the Messiah was fulfilled. *To do for him according to the custom of the law* refers to the rite of presentation which Simeon was to perform.

The introductory words of Simeon's utterance, *lettest thou thy servant depart in peace* is a statement of fact. Simeon is the watchman released from duty, because the oracle has been fulfilled. The *salvation* which Simeon had seen, the Lord's Anointed One, was for all the people of the world. Isaiah's prophecies 42:6, 49:6, and 52:10 are fulfilled in the child in Simeon's arms. Jesus would bring light to the whole world.

And Simeon was not the only one who recognized the infant's role. Anna, the aged prophetess, also acknowledged him. Her credentials as a prophetess are important: the daughter of Phanuel, the tribe of Asher, at least 84 years of age. All the prophetesses named in the Old Testament (Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther) witnessed to God's will by holiness of life and sometimes by prophesying in his name. Anna, too, was awaiting the coming of the Messiah, filling her life with prayer and fasting. *At that very hour* presumably means at the time Simeon uttered his prediction. *The redemption of Israel* is equivalent to *the consolation of Israel* in verse 25, the coming of the messianic age.

In their own time Simeon and Anna awaited the Messiah. In our age we are always waiting, trying to know what the future will bring, looking for signs. We look to stock forecasts, horoscopes, and other methods, not because we are concerned for our redemption, but we are concerned about "getting ahead." Simeon and Anna have much to teach us if we will learn: those who are waiting to hear God speak to them, those who are seeking to know his will, those who have "tuned in" to his ways by prayer, fasting and Scripture reading will be the ones who recognize him.

## HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

### The Feast of the Presentation, (Dyarnuntarach), February 14

Most of the traditions of the Armenians associated with the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple are in fact remnants from our pre-Christian days. Many customs have to do with fire, such as jumping over bonfires, and lighting the lamps in the homes from the altar candles at church. Early in our life as a Christian nation, St. Gregory united the celebration of this event

in the life of our Lord to the birth of the pagan god of sun and fire, *Vahagn*. It was commonplace to utilize the prevailing customs and practices of a pagan people and give them new Christian significance, and the Armenians were not alone in this.

Thus the connection between a pagan holiday and a Christian feast day. But the tie-in was significant, and certainly not coincidental. The importance of fire, and the mysteries that surrounded its origins, were of great consequence for early civilizations. It was easy to merge the celebration of the Presentation of the Light of the World to the remembrance of the god and fire and light. The connection between the seemingly inexplicable existence of fire, and the Eternal and Unoriginate Word of God was made, not only by the Armenians, but by the Western Church as well. In our hymns, Jesus is referred to as the "sun of righteousness" (i.e. *Aravod Loosoh, Arekagn artarootyan*), a reminder that God the Son is also the source of all life.

The Ode for the Presentation describes the events of that day in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. The words of the Ode follow below. It is significant that our pre-Christian customs still have their place in our religious life, and it also points to the beautiful way that our Christian and cultural heritages are intertwined.

#### ODE

Christ the king of glory comes this day to be presented.  
He fulfills the law by his coming on the fortieth day.  
This the prophet Isaiah did prophesy aforetime for the aged Simeon,  
in the city of Jerusalem.  
By the commandment of God, the aged one dwelt in the temple, and did  
not see death, until he saw the anointed.  
There was a cry for his coming and a fearful thunder;  
The lord of the temple, Christ had come to be presented.

*Քրիստոս փառաց թագաւորն,  
այսօր եկեալ յընծայումն, կատարելով նա զօրէնս,  
բառասնօրեայ զալրստեամբն:*

*Զոր մարգարէն Նսայի,  
յառաջագոյն զուշակեաց, յերուսաղեմ քաղաքի,  
Սիմէոն ծերունւոյն:*

*Աստուածային հրամանաւն,  
կայր ծերացեալ ի տաճարն,  
ոչ տեսաներ նա զմահ,  
մինչեւ տեսցէ նա զօծեալն:*

*Բարբառ եղեւ զալրստեան,  
եւ ահագին որոտման,  
տաճարապետն Քրիստոս,  
որ յընծայումն էր եկեալ:*