

chronic illness. The oppressed must be saved, not with a revolutionary salvation, in mere human fashion, but with the holy revolution of the Son of Man, who dies on the cross to cleanse God's image, which is soiled in today's humanity, a humanity so enslaved, so selfish, so sinful.

*The violence of love / Oscar A. Romero. 1980*

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Salvation; prophecy; worship

## Closing Prayer

Your praise, O God, reaches the ends of the earth,  
for in Christ you have entered this world  
and revealed to us your loving kindness.  
Keep us faithful to the gifts of your Spirit,  
and especially to that of charity,  
so that we and those whose lives we touch  
may see your salvation,  
and come to know you face to face in Christ,  
in whom we are fully known by you.  
We make this prayer in his name  
who is alive and reigns for ever and ever.

*Celebrating the Christian Year, Epiphany 4, Year C<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

## The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

*Sunday between 28 January and 1 February inclusive ·  
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

### Principal Service readings

Ezekiel 43.27—44.4	Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord in the temple
Psalms 48	God has shown himself on Mount Zion
1 Corinthians 13	Love never ends
Luke 2.22–40	Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the temple*

<sup>22</sup>When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), <sup>24</sup>and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup>Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;

<sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.'

<sup>33</sup>And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

<sup>36</sup>There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Luke 2.22–40 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

Luke shows Mary and Joseph fulfilling the obligations of the law. As they do so, the focus switches, not to the staff in the temple but to two characters, Simeon and Anna, who have been waiting for something that God would do. It is typical of Luke to include a man and a woman in matching stories – think of the story of the shepherd searching for a lost sheep, followed by the story of a woman searching for a lot coin, or the story of a man who sowed a seed, then the story of a woman who mixed yeast with the flour. Luke makes it clear that both men and women are called to be disciples.

Simeon and Anna are both faithful people, waiting patiently for God to redeem the ancient promises to Israel. Simeon's song of praise echoes Isaiah 49.6, where God says:

'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'

Simeon indicates the scope of Jesus' mission, not just to fulfil God's promise to Israel, but to proclaim salvation to all people.

Anna has been a widow for many years. This was not an acceptable vocation. She would have been expected to get married again and have children. But here she is in the temple, living a life dedicated to God.

Simeon and Anna are able to recognise what God is doing, even in the form of a baby, because they have been preparing for it all their lives, becoming sensitive to the presence and working of God's Holy Spirit, and hence able to utter words of prophecy.

## Quotations

1

You have one business on earth – to save souls.

John Wesley, 1703–1791

2

There is only one way to salvation, and that is to make yourself responsible for all men's sins. As soon as you make yourself responsible in all sincerity for everything and for everyone, you will see at once that this is really so, and that you are in fact to blame for everyone and for all things.

*The Brothers Karamazov* / Fyodor Dostoevsky. 1879

3

the work of salvation, in its full sense, is (1) about whole human beings, not merely souls; (2) about the present, not simply the future; and (3) about what God does through us, not merely what God does in and for us.

N. T. Wright, 1948–

4

Let us be today's Christians. Let us not take fright at the boldness of today's church. With Christ's light let us illuminate even the most hideous caverns of the human person: torture, jail, plunder, want,