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“When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth” (Luke 2:40).

1 John 2:12-17; Luke 2:36-40

Today’s Gospel is the last part of the scene in which Jesus has been brought by his parents to be presented in the temple 40 days after his birth. After the ritual, which entailed the purification of Mary and the presentation of the first-born to God, Joseph and Mary encounter Simeon and Anna, two aged prophets who have been awaiting the appearance of the messiah.

Their longing to see the fulfillment of God’s promise to save Israel forms a kind prelude to the rest of the Gospel. The long-awaited One is in the world. But first Jesus must grow up, so the Holy Family, identified as poor by their offering of turtledoves instead of a lamb, returns to Nazareth in the hill country of Galilee.

Liturgically, this scene, celebrated right before the New Year, also serves as a prelude for us as we resume our own life journeys in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation. Whatever will happen for us in the coming year, we acknowledge that God is accompanying us. The Word indwells our flesh. Human nature now has a divine destiny because of Jesus. His life, death and resurrection have transformed us, opening the way to God.

The scene in the temple describes the multi-generational life of the church, a great web of relationships along which faith is passed down from elders to parents to children. Simeon and Anna are like the older members of churches eager to hold and bless the newly baptized and the congregations that promise to pray for parents and support them as they commit to raising their children in the faith. This unbroken chain of discipleship confirms the strength and validity of the promises that carry the church forward even through hardship and crisis.

Anna is a life-long widow and therefore one of God's *anawim* -- the little ones who depend totally on God -- and she rejoices to hold and bless the child of simple parents, a small-town carpenter and his wife, ordinary people from the margins of society. It is from such as these, the poor, meek and powerless, that God will appear to save the world. Not with armies or wealth or influence, but by the power of love.

New Year's Day invites us to resolve to live more fully and deeply our brief lives, to find purpose and joy for ourselves and for others. What better guides can we find than those prophets who have gone before us and are eager to share their wisdom?

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