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“Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested” (Heb 2:18).

### **Presentation of the Lord**

*Mal 3:1-4; Heb 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40).*

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord falls in February, a month whose name, *Februarius* in Latin, was associated by the Romans with purification. Seasonally it was a time when the land lay fallow and nature appeared to rest and regenerate before the onset of Spring. People devoted its days to reflection and renewal, making resolutions for the year ahead.

In today’s first reading from Malachi, the messenger sent by God to the temple was someone who would purify Israel like a refiner of silver, removing impurities by fire. We speak of crisis as a kind of “baptism of fire” when our strengths and weaknesses are exposed and tested. The reading from Hebrews affirms that the high priest must be tested if he is to represent the people before God. Jesus is such a high priest because he has suffered everything others are facing.

Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the temple for ritual purification and dedication to God. The scene serves as a kind of overture to the full opera of what is to come. Simeon and Anna witness to the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets, and Mary learns of the suffering and rejection to come. This child will be a sign of contradiction, and a sword of sorrow will pierce her own heart. Filled with wonder and the weight of these words, the family returns to the anonymity of their lives in

Nazareth in the hill country of Galilee. The stage is set for what was to come.

While the early years of Jesus life may be called “hidden,” they were certainly not empty of significance. Mary and Joseph, like all parents, sought to form him for the challenges to come. They grounded him in the liturgical life of the temple, obedience to the Law and attendance at synagogue, where he heard the Scriptures read and discussed. Like Joseph, he had integrity and a work ethic. Like Mary, he pondered everything deeply in the light of the Spirit and through prayer and reflection. When that Spirit prompted him to begin his public ministry, Jesus was ready to be tested.

At his baptism Jesus was confirmed as God’s beloved Son, formed in the divine image. His testing in the desert was Satan’s furious attempt to reclaim Jesus with spectacle, bread and worldly glory. He passed that test. From the start of his ministry, Jesus confronted sin’s damage to human nature. His presence was a sign of contradiction, and his enemies assaulted him repeatedly to block the authority that flowed from him into everything he touched and restored as it was intended to be.

In the end, the crucified Jesus was sin’s response to God’s offer of redemption. But because Jesus had undergone the baptism of fire that restored humanity, he was raised up as the firstborn of the new Creation. Sharing our flesh and blood, Jesus liberated us from the power of sin and death. The sign of contradiction became the sign of glory.

Because of Jesus, we are all presented anew to God today, blessed by his redemptive glory, nourished at the altar of his sacrifice with his risen body and blood. Those who have experienced life’s full range of suffering and testing, our elderly models and mentors, will be first to attest to the mystery of God’s grace among us. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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