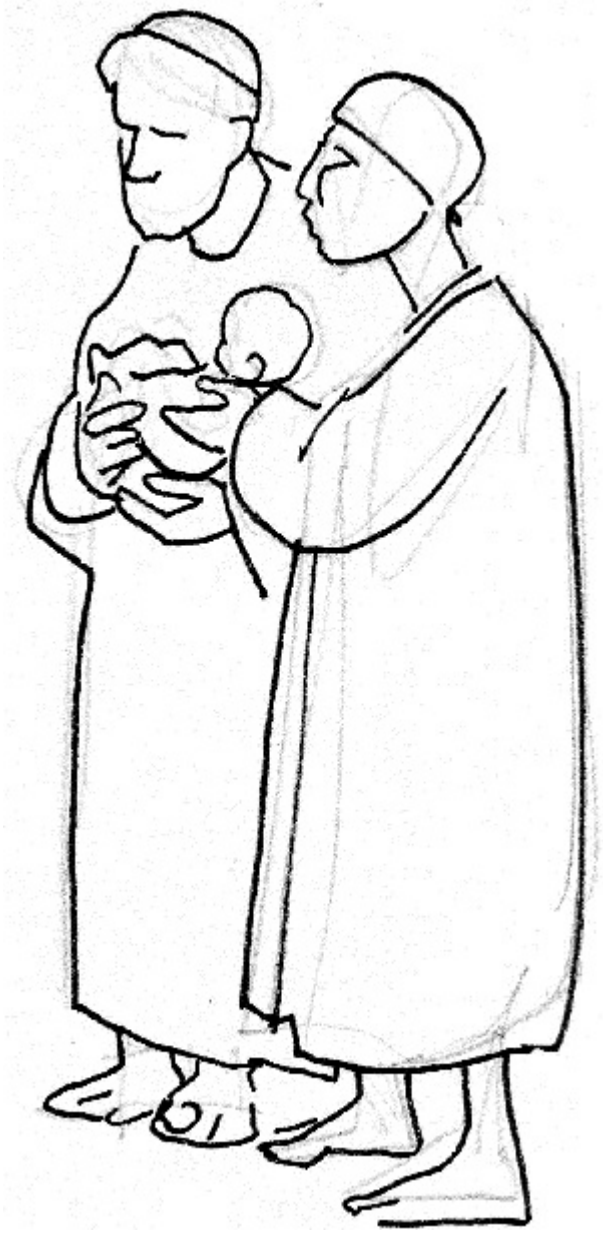
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“They took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22).

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

Presentation of the Lord

The expression “Make it plain” is used in the PBS documentary about Malcom X, who always asked when he was being introduced to an audience to dispense with the usual flattery or long list of credentials. Get to the point, just the essentials. As a complex but prophetic figure in the struggle for racial justice, Malcom X was making his message plain on February 21, 1965, when he was assassinated in New York.

Jesus needed little introduction, and the Gospels present him as succinct and direct in his preaching and encounters with everyone. His self-introduction in Nazareth at the start of his ministry shows Jesus defining his entire ministry with a few lines from the scroll of Isaiah, followed by the words, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). He spoke the truth plainly before the Sanhedrin and to Pilate when they were deciding his fate.

Today’s Feast of the Presentation, like the Solemnity of the Epiphany, reveals Jesus to the world. When he was presented in the temple as an infant, Simeon and Anna, elderly prophets, speak for him. He is the promised messiah, but as Simeon tells Mary, he will complete his mission not as a military hero but in contradiction and sorrow and that she will share this suffering fully. Only 40 days old when his parents took him to the temple for purification according to the Law, Jesus is already marked for death.

Jesus defined the role for every plain speaker who has followed him in history. His power was to make everything he said come true in our hearing because he lived it. His example inspired and sustained many of the courageous people we celebrate during Black History Month: Medgar Evers, killed in 1963, John Lewis, baptized in blood on the bridge in Selma, Al., Rosa Parks by sitting down on a bus and Fannie Lou Hamer by standing up at the Democratic convention, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, assassinated for refusing to stop speaking the plain truth about racial injustice in America.

Every Christian is presented to God and dedicated to the Gospel on the day of their baptism. Discipleship is then the plain and simple agenda for the rest of their lives, to reach human maturity and holiness in the way they live and die in imitation of Jesus. If we die to ourselves and live for him and for one another, we will again be presented to God and welcomed into the company of prophets, saints and martyrs.

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