

Created Beautiful and Messy

[Luke 2:22-40](#)

Happy Groundhog day! I understand that in Pennsylvania this morning, the groundhog did not see his shadow and so we can expect an early spring. It was the Germans and the Dutch who brought the tradition of Groundhog day to America. The tradition was probably originally based on a bear coming out of hibernation, but as bears became scarce it became a fox or a badger and that translated here to a Ground Hog.

Ground hogs or no, February 2nd is a day with a lot of meaning to humanity through the centuries. In the ancient Gaelic tradition February 1st is Imbolc, a festival which comes halfway between the Winter Solstice and the Equinox and which heralds the coming of spring. It is a festival closely associated with Brigid – the ancient goddess of fertility who comes into Christianity as St Brigid. Brigid was the midwife of the spring – she would bring people from the darkness of the winter into the light of the spring.

For Christians, February 2nd is 40 days after December 25th, the celebration of the Incarnation, and so in Jewish custom, Jesus was brought to the temple to be dedicated to God, and Mary came to be declared clean after giving birth. In Christian custom, this day has marked the end of Christmas and follows the ancient tradition of being a festival of light. It is known as Candlemas because people brought their candles to church to be blessed. In the gospel reading Simeon says

for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.

This is a day of celebration because the salvation of God is seen, the light is in the world and cannot be hidden.

In the 4th century, a woman named Egeria who was visiting Jerusalem wrote about this day, “But certainly the Feast of the Purification is celebrated here with the greatest honor. On this day there is a procession to the [place of the resurrection]; all go in procession, and all things are done in order with great joy, just as at Easter. All the priests preach, and also the bishop, always treating of that passage of the Gospel where, on the fortieth day, Joseph and Mary brought the Lord into the Temple.”¹

You will be glad to know that I have not invited all the priests to preach today!

I love this story. It is somehow so sweet, up-close and personal even as it reverberates through time and space.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candlemas>

Simeon and Anna have been faithful all their lives, waiting for the Messiah to be revealed. I imagine it must have been tempting to give up hope as they got older. That morning, Simeon felt the Spirit urging him to the temple and so he went, not knowing what if anything to expect. And today was the day, the day he had been waiting for! Today was the day when the Messiah came to the temple as a little human baby just six weeks old, and Simeon saw the truth and proclaimed it. Anna the prophetess was in her eighties which is quite old today and was very old then. She too recognized the Messiah – the redeemer of Israel, and began to tell everyone about him.

Let's pause and think for a moment – how many women prophets are mentioned by name in the Bible?

I only came up with two others, Deborah in the book of Judges, and Miriam, Moses' sister. So I googled it and discovered two more - Huldah in the time of King Josiah and Noadiah in the time of Nehemiah. Apparently, Isaiah's wife was also a prophetess, but is not named. So in this great book of books, spanning centuries of human life and interaction with God we see only five named women prophets: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah... and Anna.

This story is unusually gender balanced. Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon. It is also surprising within the church tradition – it is a feast of Christ and also a feast of Mary. Until the late 60s it was celebrated as the Feast of the Purification rather than the Feast of the Presentation. Because there were two reasons they went to the temple – both for Mary to be made ritually clean according to the instructions given in Leviticus 12, and for Jesus to be presented to God.

So we may, I think, see this feast day as the coming together of the masculine and the feminine, which in archetypal psychology is the wholeness or healing that we all seek. The coming together of spirit and matter. The woman comes to the end of her term of “impurity”, the light of the spirit is revealed. The Messiah brings wholeness to creation. And it all takes place within the temple. This is a beautiful mystical vision which ties in with the ancient understandings of this season, and even with the silliness of the groundhog who comes out of the earth to experience the light and then goes back again.

It is a beautiful mystical vision which brings together spirit and matter, male and female into a wholeness. Too often we have separated out spirit from matter, God from creation. We have gotten caught up in notions that somehow matter is bad or less than spirit, that woman is darker than man who is closer to God and the light.

Mother Julian of Norwich presents us with a very different picture when she writes,

The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life ... The mother can lay her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender Mother Jesus can lead us easily into his blessed breast through his sweet open side, and show us there a part of

the godhead and of the joys of heaven, with inner certainty of endless bliss ...
This fair lovely word 'mother' is so sweet and so kind in itself that it cannot truly be said of anyone or to anyone except of him and to him who is the true Mother of life and of all things. To the property of motherhood belong nature, love, wisdom, and knowledge, and this is God.

Probably the Jewish law declared women unclean for forty days because they had a horror of body fluids. But Julian celebrates the female body with all its fluids even as she celebrates the sweetness, love, wisdom and knowledge of God. In all our human beauty and messiness, we are beloved of God. We were created both beautiful and messy by God. We are not beings of light trapped in a human body but human beings living an incarnational spirituality. It is all of a oneness.

Today we celebrate the revelation of the Messiah as declared not just by the old white guy but also by the crone. Today we celebrate God coming into the world in all the messiness of human form. Today we celebrate the coming together of earth and heaven, of spirit and matter. Today we celebrate the spring which triumphs over the winter, the coming of the light which has conquered the night.

Today we celebrate God become human and, in God, human become fully human.

For the glory of God is the human being fully alive!

Alleluia!