February 2 is the much-ballyhooed Groundhog Day. In Wisconsin, where I grew up, if we got to see Spring six weeks from this date (which is, in fact, the first day of Spring on the calendar), it was an early spring indeed, terrified rodent or not.

That groundhog afraid of his own shadow might be a good mascot for us in these dreary February days, though. Far too often we act as though there’s a monster under the bed, something in the dark that’s waiting to pounce on us. We wake up from our sleepy lives and as soon as we’re confronted with something new and perhaps startling, we run back to our caves. We think we must have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and we scurry back to where we’re comfortable, even if it’s a dark, underground den.

For the past few Sundays we’ve heard accounts of Jesus calling his first followers. We might be feeling exhilarated by that challenge, or we might be feeling not quite up to the task. Today, the liturgical calendar takes us back to the Christmas season with the feast of the presentation of the Lord. But if we think it’s going to be time to bask once again in the soft glow of Christmas lights, then we need to take another look at the Gospel reading.

While the infant Jesus is recognized as the promised messenger of salvation, the revelation also brings with it the promise of discord and contradiction. Salvation isn’t going to be a cozy retreat. Simeon prophesies that a sword will pierce Mary’s heart. He also says the thoughts of many will be laid bare.

While this feast has its somber moments, however, it is celebrated as a feast of light and often referred to as Candlemas. In times past, the year’s supply of candles were blessed on this feast. We include it among the joyful mysteries of the rosary.

Simeon and Anna both seem to be well-known in the Temple precincts. You know people in your own parish who are always around. They attend daily Mass and all the extra events in the parish. They’ve been part of the parish for as long as most people can recall. They keep the faith and their very presence is part of handing on the faith to new generations. They’ve been around long enough to know that all life is a mix of darkness and light, but they believe the light always prevails—no need to run from its rays.

When these two holy people see Mary and Joseph and the child Jesus, they recognize the divine presence and herald the good news. Luke tells us that both of them proclaim prophetic words about this child. They were truly in the right place at the right time.

But I suspect they would also proclaim the wonder of all the infants being brought to the Temple to be presented to God. Yes, Jesus was special, but each child was part of the Chosen People. Jesus was being claimed and redeemed in this ritual presentation. In the same way, each child brought to our churches for Baptism increases our family of faith. And, like Simeon and Anna, we welcome those children and proclaim the wonder of their lives as they’re presented to God.

At the end of our lives, we will be brought forth once more to be presented to God in the funeral Mass of the Resurrection. We will be welcomed into eternity with wonder and awe. What we do between those two presentations will determine how much we ourselves are in the right place at the right time.

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**SUNDAY READINGS**

**Malachi 3:1-4**
God assures the people a messenger is coming to prepare the way. But will they listen to what the messenger has to say?

**Hebrews 2:14-18**
The Son of God really took on human nature. Therefore, he could identify with us and expiate our sins by dying for us.

**Luke 2:22-40**
Jesus is redeemed and Mary purified. The prophets Simeon and Anna testify to the divine child.
We tend to be skeptical of people who claim to have visions or hear the voice of God telling them what they should be doing. Divine revelation is a tough thing to believe in our day. Even the Church doesn’t require us to believe in private revelations such as various appearances of Mary to devout believers, even if those revelations have been found to be authentic.

People in the Middle Ages were more likely to describe inspiration in terms of visions. St. Francis says that he heard Christ speaking to him from the cross at San Damiano. He wrote in his Testament: “When God gave me some friars, there was no one to tell me what I should do; but the Most High himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of the Gospel.”

When we look at this with the eyes of faith rather than the microscope of a scientist, however, we know that we’ve all had times when we somehow knew that a decision or a course of action was the right one, blessed by divine approval, guided by the hand of God. It’s less a spotlight vision and more of a gentle glow illuminating our intuition.

**PRAYER**

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your will. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of your peoples, a light to enlighten the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

—Luke 2:29-32

In busy families, daily tasks soon become rote. Dinner is at 6, bedtime is at 9, and lunch is always sandwich, fruit, snack, and drink. As much as these habits can save time, they can also stifle our creativity.

When I deputized my oldest to pack all the kids’ school lunches, they complained about the fare, which featured peanut-butter-and-cheese sandwiches. While that sandwich combo had to go, some of his other ideas changed how we thought about lunches.

The Feast of the Presentation is a good time to remind ourselves that we don’t have to be the same we’ve always been or do things the same way. Sometimes it takes a new role or another perspective to show us that each of us can be more than we have been.

Even as the luster of the New Year is starting to wane, our faith asks us to see each day, each moment as a new beginning. Who will you be today?