

## **Sermon Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple 2025**

Christianity has always been a proselytising religion. Our faith is one which actively seeks to convert. Core to our faith and practice is the desire to make disciples for the Lord Jesus. As the hymn says, 'we have a gospel to proclaim.' Now, this of course confounds those branches of Christianity which have all but given up on the evangelical and missionary work of the church. They say Christianity is just one path to God. They say that all religions are equal and valid in the search for meaning, that Jesus is one holy teacher amongst many. But the results of such perversions of the faith are there for all the world to see: dead, empty churches.

Christianity is a missionary religion precisely because we seek to be faithful to the exclusive claims the New Testament makes for Jesus. *I am the way, the truth and the life; The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few; Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned; If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* Many other verses besides make an emphatic point. And one which cannot be ignored or dismissed.

The evangelical and missionary life of the church is patterned after Jesus' own ministry. We hear throughout the gospels how he went from town to town healing, teaching and proclaiming the good news. In Luke's gospel we hear Jesus commission the twelve to likewise go out *to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal*. Later in this gospel are told of the 70 who were commissioned to go out ahead of him in pairs: *The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few*. At the end of Matthew's gospel, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you*. Traditional, orthodox Christianity, anchored in the witness of the scriptures, is convinced of the saving truth of the Gospel and so seeks to share it. And forget about the false distinction between Catholic and Evangelical. A properly Catholic Church is Evangelical. And a properly Evangelical church is Catholic.

Perhaps our conviction in the saving truth of Jesus Christ could be simply and succinctly summed up: *I am the light of the world*. That assertion is from John's gospel. But a similar point we have heard in our gospel today. On this feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple we hear old Simeon proclaim, *my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the gentiles*.

Now, if we cast our minds back just a few weeks the same point was made. On the feast of the Epiphany we hear how the wise men, representing all nations, find the Christ Child by *the light* of a star. Christ is light to the nations, light to the gentiles. The consistent witness of the New Testament is that Christ comes into the world not simply to his own people but for all people. *I am the light of the world.*

It is no accident, then, that the key symbol at work in our celebration today is the lighted candle. We have blessed the candles that will be in use in this church for the rest of the year. We have lit candles for our procession at the start of mass, lit them again for the proclamation of the gospel, and will do so again for the consecration of the body and blood of Christ. And these actions not just pious rituals. They are all reminders that Christ is present to us and that we ought to carry his light into the world around us.

Now, for a very long time, and rightly so, the missionary work of the church was directed to what was frequently called ‘foreign lands’. Many churches had ‘overseas mission agencies.’ Today this work continues, though perhaps with less urgency than before. Still, there are faithful Christians committed to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to peoples new to the gospel and to those who have never heard the gospel. And the work to translate the Bible into any number of languages continues. Alongside this the church continues to run schools, hospitals, clinics and the like recognising that a key aspect of the church’s evangelising mission has been – in the words of the gospels – to teach and to heal. The light of Christ, then, is not just experienced as good news for the soul, but good news for the whole person, and indeed whole communities. And this has been true for centuries, indeed millennia.

But in the past it has been all too easy for Christians to say that the work of sharing the faith, proclaiming the good news, has been the work of experts and specialists. It has been just a little too easy for us to accept that the solemn charge to share in the church’s work of evangelism, of carrying the light of Christ out into the world, has been the task of missionaries and such. But we are *all* charged with carrying the light of Christ into our various situations. For very good reason our baptismal rites have the newly baptised presented with a lighted candle. Bringing Christ’s light into the world is the work of us all. And just as the faith was brought into new lands with a sense of urgency, so there is an urgency in our situation, in our context.

As has been said on more than one occasion from this pulpit, and something you have surely observed yourself, is the loss of faith in this country and many like ours. The gospel is forgotten, dismissed or even subverted. The light has been extinguished. Our own neighbourhoods have become foreign lands. *Our* experience of faith is shared by fewer and fewer people. Isaiah's prophecy that *the people in darkness have seen a great light* for us is reversed. *The people who have been in light now walk in darkness.*

There is a cloud of darkness over us. Even a little exercise of the imagination will reveal that all is not well. Loneliness and addiction and broken relationships scar countless lives. The hollowing out of our moral conscience over several generations now has seen an increasing inability to judge right from wrong, an inability to assert what is true and what is false. That our city centres and universities are captured by pro-Palestinian protests, and that our Jewish neighbours once more live in fear is but a symptom of this.

The issue of violence and drug addiction in *this* neighbourhood is hardly hidden. But all around us we see a devaluing of the sanctity of human life. In every state in this country abortion is legal for any situation up to birth. 80,000 children a year are killed in Australia through abortion, giving lie to the argument that this should be rare and only for medical purposes.

In the Netherlands and Belgium children (children!) can be euthanized. In Canada (a culture in many regards similar to ours) Euthanasia is now the cause of nearly 5% of all deaths. There are countless shocking stories of people being offered euthanasia not because they are facing unbearable suffering (as the proponents will always claim). But simply for depression, for homelessness, and disability, and to those who cannot afford medical treatment. If you think that is a distant threat, remember that because of its pro-life stance a catholic hospital in Canberra was recently stolen by the Territory government.

Children in our schools are sold the lie that they can be born the wrong body. (Let's be clear, nobody is born in the wrong body and there is no evidence at all to support his claim!) Our medical system follows an "affirmation" only approach, pushing vulnerable children down a dangerous path of puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and ultimately, irreversible surgeries. In short, our medical and education systems support a policy of mutilating the healthy bodies of minors for ideological causes. And there are now a couple of generations who see no hope or prospect for the future, who believe humanity is a scourge on the face of the earth, due to their indoctrination into climate alarmism. All is *not* well.

Into all this good news *needs to be spoken!* Into all this the light of an alternative way needs to be offered, needs to be made clear. Now, for most of us I imagine this does not come easily or naturally to us. Truth be told, most of us prefer to just go with the flow; to not cause any disturbance; to say, 'I don't want to cause a fuss, I don't want to be the source of any trouble.' So we keep quiet. We don't want to be seen expressing an opinion that is against the majority or against polite society. We keep the light to ourselves, hidden under a bushel. Now, the prophecy of old Simeon includes that the Christ Child will be *a sign of contradiction*. For us who bear the name of Christ, who have been baptised into Christ, who are commissioned to carry Christ into the world, this is part of *our* mission as well: to be a sign of contradiction.

The saying goes, *it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness*. We light candles not only in honour of Christ our Light. But also because we are a religion of hope. The church, then, needs to be a beacon of hope, of light and of truth. Light can lead the way. The darkness can be conquered. We do not have to be expert. We do not have to be specially trained. We simply need the courage of our convictions. Courage that what has been good news for us will also be good news for all. Amen.