



I never knew about this whole Presentation of Our Lord thing until I got to college. It was there that I joined a choir with a director who seemed to be the encapsulation of a die-hard Lutheran, who struggled so mightily to change with the times. For starters, he did his absolute best to hold off on caving into those red ELW hymnals that we have in the pews, clinging so tightly to the good 'ole green LBWs that filled German descendent sanctuaries for decades. Quite honestly, he tended to prefer the music from before 1950. Some students thought he was nothing short of a crochety 'ole curmudgeon, often wearing his aged suspenders when he taught classes on campus. And yet, more than enough early twenty-somethings still experienced hope through his more...traditional music ministry, including on a night in early February every year.

The Presentation of Our Lord worship was one of his favorite festivals in the entire church calendar, as he went back in history to shape the service as it had been done in the church centuries before. So, as the time approached 7pm, all the lights in the university chapel were turned off. It would just be candlelight filling the space of the sanctuary, by each one of the pews, surrounding the altar, and the music stands up-front. The organ wasn't touched that night. The pre-service music was all lutes and recorders, trying to set the scene of a holy ambiance: that we were about to be embraced with the light of Christ no matter how dark it may appear surrounding us.

Not only that, but in trying to stick as much as possible to the historical tradition, that crochety 'ole choir director recruited several male college students for the small ensemble that night, since, for the longest time, only boys and men sang in choirs. For the service, he would have us only do Gregorian chants, some of which were over a thousand years old. Even the Gospel story we just heard about Simeon and Anna meeting the Christ child for the first time, the entire text was chanted by the campus pastor. It all seemed to be the most perfect night for the die-hard Lutherans, for any who struggled so mightily with any changes made since the time of a German reforming monk a half millennia ago.

Nevertheless, part of what made the night so special regardless of whether the people who showed up were huge ancient music fans or not, were all those candles lit, as if it was just as holy to witness that breath-taking sight as it was only about a month before when signing Silent Night. After all, part of the tried-and-true tradition of the church for the Presentation of Our Lord was blessing the candles that would be used in whatever form of ministry for the year ahead. Because it was Simeon who so beautifully proclaimed that Jesus was the "light for revelation to the Gentiles," a revelation of hope and beauty and the most breath-taking love we could ever imagine.

However, even though the candles were blessed that night with a special prayer and all, they would all need to be extinguished before everyone departed back out in the world filled with changes galore, seemingly overrun with despair and anger. That reality check often leads children of God to wonder if the light of Christ barely flickers at all within us amidst all that fear and worry. Except, one candle stayed lit throughout the night and for all our days on that campus and beyond. It is a candle that hangs over German descendent sanctuaries all over the world. We call it the eternal candle, serving as a reminder that the light of Christ, for some reason beyond

our comprehension, insists on staying lit not just over sacred altar spaces, but within us, no matter what.

Oddly enough, on that night we celebrated the Presentation of Our Lord, the eternal candle seemed to be perfectly soaring over the center of us male twenty-somethings and that crochety 'ole choir director. As if somehow, Christ is more than capable of shining through the ones who crave the hymns from centuries ago, and the ones who maybe wouldn't mind some music from this century, too, and even the ones who don't mind a little bit of both and everything in between. The light of Christ is more than bright enough to shine through us all.

Yes, one member of that random ensemble of a choir turned out to be a pastor. Another went on to be a music teacher, another into not-for-profit work, another with government. Evidently, there isn't just one way to shine this most breath-taking light of Christ: not just around altar spaces, but in front of classrooms, and basement conference halls, and the places where the rest of us wonder if any constructive good gets done at all. Jesus insists on showing us that it's more than possible, that it didn't stop in front of Simeon or the disciples long ago. Our Lord was not presented into our hearts from the very beginning to convince us that you have to do this or that, that you have to stick with what was done for centuries, in order to truly shine. Jesus is more than capable of brightly shining with whatever gifts you have to share with the world. And no matter what changes may emerge, no matter how much darkness may seem to overwhelm the surroundings, that brightest light of Christ is never ever going out within you and throughout this whole world that God for some reason beyond our comprehension still thoroughly adores. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!