

A young man was very excited because he'd just won a ticket to the Super Bowl. His excitement dimmed as he realized that his seat was high and back in the gigantic stadium. As he searched the rows ahead of him for a better seat, he found an empty one right next to the field – on the 50 yard line! He approached the man sitting next to the empty seat and asked if it was taken. The man replied, "No – and I'm certain it will not be occupied, so you are welcome to sit there." Amazed, the young man asked, "How could anyone pass up a seat like this?" The older gentleman responded, "That's my wife's seat. We've been to every Super Bowl together since the day we were married – but she has passed away." "Oh, how sad," the younger man replied. "I'm so sorry to hear that – but couldn't you find a friend or relative to come with you?" "No," the man said, "They're all at the funeral." (HOMILETICS, July-August 2011, COMMUNICATION RESOURCES, p. 73)

Here are 2 poetic descriptions: On Simeon: "Jesus was still in diapers when his parents brought him to the Temple in Jerusalem 'to present him to the Lord' (Lk 2:22), as the custom was, and offer a sacrifice, and that's when old Simeon spotted him. Years before, he'd been told he wouldn't die till he'd seen the Messiah with his own 2 eyes, and time was running out. When the moment finally came, one look through his cataract lenses was all it took. He asked if it would be all right to hold the baby in his arms, and they told him to go ahead but be careful not to drop it.

"Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word, for mine eyes have seen your salvation," he said (Lk 2:29), the baby playing with the fringes of his beard. The parents were pleased as punch, and so he blessed them too for good measure. Then something about the mother stopped him, and his expression changed. What he saw in her face was a long way off, but it was there so plainly he couldn't pretend. "A sword will pierce through your soul," he said. (Lk 2:35). He would rather have bitten off his tongue than said it, but in that holy place he felt he had no choice. Then he handed her back the baby and departed in something less than the perfect peace he'd dreamed of all the long years of his waiting. (Buechner, PECULIAR TREASURES, p. 156-157)

And for Anna: "mysterious prophet of the temple....the patient doddering dame, trusting until death that God has indeed come into the world. God's coming is heralded abroad by the shaky song of old woman Anna, sharing a cane with old man Simeon, leaning on each other in the hallways of the courts of God. (Gail Ramshaw, A METAPHORICAL GOD: AN Abcedary of Image for God, p. 6)

Now some background. This feast is called 'The meeting' – between Jesus and Simeon – in the eastern churches. It is 40 days after Christmas because of the Torah's requirement that women be 'purified' 40 days after childbirth (Lev 12:1-8) The procession with candles was introduced in Rome by Pope Serbius I (687-701), in the late 7th century. Scholars speculate that this was to replace a pre-Christian procession around the city walls of Rome to ward off evil. The candles carried by the participants replaced symbols of the gods. And believe it or not, there is also a connection to Groundhog Day! Many ancient peoples saw February 2nd as one of the turning points of the year – a time to take a breath and think about the end of the winter. Punxsatawney Phil and Sir Walter Wally have a lot of history! So while darkness still holds more hours than daylight, there is every hope of spring, and so the church has kept this feast with the place of worship full of lights – Candlemas Day. (adapted from Gabe Huck, in LEADER'S MANUAL: HYMNAL FOR CATHOLIC STUDENTS, p. 78, and HOMILY SERVICE, THE LITURGICAL CONFERENCE, Vol 31 #11, February 1999, p. 11-12)

Second, meeting is HYPAPANTE in Greek. HYPAPANTE means to show or make manifest. To bring what is hidden to light. The feast gives us an ancient man's prayer for lively release, cracking open what might have remained forgotten in a far-off Roman outpost. But Simeon demands that we *proclaim* the Christ – the light -- to all the nations. HYPAPANTE. It is a feast of silences. The child's mother stores all these wonders in her heart. Stores them knowing that the marvels she witnesses will be shrouded in suffering. Hopes against hope that the heart rending of Golgotha will be replaced by the heart mending of the garden of Resurrection. Some things are too real to be spoken aloud. HYPAPANTE. It is a feast of sacrifice. A pair of turtledoves proclaims the translation of sacrifice itself. The dark tragedy of Calvary will be immolated into glory in Easter's dawn. One sacrifice offered once for all.

HYPAPANTE. It is a feast of showing. An epiphany. Even now. For why have we gathered in Eucharistic celebration? Why have we gathered if not to see in the bread and wine an action frozen in a symbol. Bread become Body. Wine become Blood. Ready to be broken so that the whole world might be healed, that the whole world might be fed. Ready to be consumed that the whole world might become one body. We are to become what we eat. HYPAPANTE. It is a feast of supplantation. We see in this final epiphany of Christmas – our present state. We stand between realities. What has been revealed has yet to reveal fully. That in which we revel will reveal us into even greater joy. We need but present ourselves to its presentation. We have come here to meet CHRIST. And He is revealed in the most humble of ways. In bread and wine, in the person next to us, in front of us, behind us. (this entire section adapted from a homily preached at Theological College by Rev. David Thayer, SS, on this feast in the early 90's.)

Third, the encounter with God. St. John Damascene (675-753) wrote: I do not worship matter. I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honoring that matter which works my salvation. (Rohr, THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST, page before CONTENTS) Or put more whimsically, "Gelato is what God would taste like if someone froze Him and crammed Him into a paper cup." OR as my Italian spiritual director puts it: "Pasta is divine love made edible." (Morgan Cron, CHASING FRANCIS, p. 122, adapted) Teilhard de Chardin said there is nothing profane for those who have learned how to see. There is only one world, and it's the supernatural one. There is no 'natural' world where God is not. It is all supernatural. All the bushes burn now if you have seen one burn. Only one tree has to fill up with light and angels, and then you never see trees the same again. That's the true seeing – the encounter – the meeting – celebrated in the Feast of the Presentation – the final liturgical moment of the Christmas-Incarnation mystery. (EVERYTHING BELONGS, Richard Rohr, page not cited)

The God we encounter is found everywhere around us – in everyone and everything. A Moslem mystic, Hafiz (c.1320-89) wrote a poem called "YOU LEFT A THOUSAND WOMEN CRAZY: Beloved/ Last time,/ When you walked through the city/ So beautiful and so naked,/ You left a thousand women crazy/ And impossible to live with./ You left a thousand married men/ Confused about their gender./ Children ran from their classrooms,/ And teachers were glad you came./ And the sun tried to break out/ Of its royal cage in the sky/ And at last, and at last,/ Lay its Ancient Love at Your feet." Hafiz is talking about God's abundant presence walking through the streets of time – in other words – everywhere we go, God is already there! The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung had a sign hanging over his living room in Zurich which read: "Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit." "Called or not called, God will be there." In other words, God is everywhere, whether we recognize Him or not. God is in one another, in nature, in fascinations and feelings. He is in our seething human desire, which is a sweet path to God. God is alluring like human desire, drawing us to Him in what and whom we love. We believe in a God who became flesh, like us, and 'pitched His tent among us' (John 1:14) (adapted from EVERYTHING BELONGS, Rohr, page not cited)

What the Feast of the Presentation/the encounter, reminds us is that the God who has become incarnate in human flesh is found, first and foremost, not in meditation and monasteries, albeit God is found there, but in our homes. As Nikos Kazantzakis puts it: “Wherever you find husband and wife, that’s where you find God; wherever children and petty cares and cooking and arguments and reconciliation are, that is where God is too.” The God of the Incarnation is more domestic than monastic. Found in an old man and old woman in the temple, and a baby in diapers with totally bewildered parents.

If God is incarnate in ordinary life then we should seek God, first of all, within ordinary life. Too often, even though we know this theoretically, practically we still look for God in the extraordinary. For example, why do we go on pilgrimages to holy places and not instead sit barefoot and feel the holiness of the soil in our own backyard? Why do we go to places like Lourdes and Fatima, to see where the Blessed Virgin might have cried, and not notice the tears in the eyes of the person sitting across the family table from ourselves? Why are we all enthralled by Padre Pio, who carried the wounds of Jesus in his hands and feet, and so often blind to the wounds of Christ in the face of the needy person we try to avoid? There is nothing wrong with pilgrimages, Marian shrines, and Padre Pio, but it is not through them that God says the most important things to us. A friend of mine shares how he used to golf regularly with a very sincere and enthusiastic, evangelical Christian who was always praying that God might give him a vision. One day my friend said to him: “Do you want to see a vision of God? Get up tomorrow and watch the sun rise. That’s as good as God does!”

This is the meaning of the Incarnation, the Meaning of Christmas, and the meaning of the Feast of the Presentation. HYPAPANTE! We meet God everywhere! The God who is love and family, who was born in a barn, is a God who is found, first of all, in our homes, in our families, at our tables, in sunrises, in our joys, and in our arguments. To be involved in the normal flow of life, giving and receiving, as flawed and painful as this might be, is to have the life of God flow through us. We think we are going out to meet God – but God is already in our hearts. The Meeting is within, without, before and behind, above and below., as St. Patrick prayed in his famous prayer BREASTPLATE. HYPAPANTE. We meet God. Everywhere. AMEN. (last section adapted from Ronald Rolheiser, THE HOLY LONGING, p. 100-101)