**Presentation of our Lord in the Temple, Feb 2, 2014;**

**Malachi 3:1-4; Ps 84, Heb 2:14-14; Luke 2:22-40;Rev M. Trainor**

Would you believe that last year 12. 4 million people watched this show on this day -- no, it was not the Super bowl -- it was the Puppy Bowl! Today is the 10th annual Puppy Bowl on Animal Planet, where 63 puppies play inside a model stadium. A VERY popular show, apparently! Camera shots even include puppies licking the camera lens (which they are motivated to lick because of peanut butter smeared on it). But, cleaning off the lens would be a small task compared to cleaning up after 63 puppies in that stadium. Can you imagine? This bring us to our topic of today: cleaning. Floors are not the only things that need cleaning, our hearts need cleaning too--and God does this cleaning, if we let Him. In our opening prayer we prayed that "**we may be presented to You with pure and clean hearts..."**

Today, we began with the Candlemas procession -- signifying Christ's Light - that shines upon us.Today is the feast day of the Presentation of Jesus and the Purification of Mary in the Temple. These are in compliance with the Jewish law, because it is now 40 days after Jesus' birth. Picture the scene at the Temple that day: hungry screaming baby with dirty diapers (but no Pampers in those days) after a long trip; tired new first time parents Mary and Joseph also burdened by having to carry two birds with them. This would have been quite the sight! They must have seen this as something to get over with: compliance. But the day was anything but compliance, it was a true blessing. While at the Temple, they met two really interesting people: Simeon and Anna. One would not think that these two old people hanging out in the Temple would be that attention-grabbing, but oh my -- they were!

Simeon was a special guy because, although it was before Pentecost, he had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit! Through the Spirit's leading, Simeon had learned that before he died he was going to meet the Messiah. But he did not know where or when. On this particular day, Simeon had another leading by the Spirit : go to the Temple NOW. So, there he was, at the same time as Mary and Joseph and Jesus. The Temple was an enormous place, but Simeon made a beeline for Jesus, and "***took Him in his arms and praised God.***" He said the famous words of what we call the Nunc Dimittis, or Song of Simeon. In these words he expresses his gratitude for meeting Jesus, just as the Holy Spirit had promised, and reaffirms the identity of Jesus. Linda sang the Song of Simeon earlier today; its on page 93 in your prayer book, Canticle 17 (it's on p. 66 too). Let's pray it together now: **Lord, you now have set your servant free \*  to go in peace as you have promised; For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, \* whom you have prepared for all the world to see: A Light to enlighten the nations, \*   and the glory of your people Israel.**Simeon is rejoicing! Then, along came Anna, who we are told was 84 and actually lived in the Temple. She appeared, and recognized Jesus as Messiah too--and then we are told that she " ***began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption***!"

That day, Jesus was presented, Mary went through a purification rite and Simeon and Anna met the Messiah. Simeon and Anna had prepared their hearts to meet Jesus. Today, we have come here to meet Jesus too, and before we do that we to are to prepare our hearts, to have them purified. To purify means to make clean, to get rid of contaminants. Malachi, in our OT lesson today, talks about how God makes us clean--and he uses a very powerful metaphor: the refiner's fire. Malachi says, "***for He*** *(meaning Jesus)* ***is like a refiner's fire*....*he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver...and refine them."*** Refiner's fire is what silversmiths do to turn silver from being rough and full of impurities, to being shiny and smooth. It requires holding the silver over the flame in such a way that all the bad stuff disappears. When asked how to know when the silver is pure, a silversmith responded: **"Oh, that’s easy--when I see my image in it."**

We are like precious silver in the hands of the God, and when God has done His work in us His image is reflected back to others through us. When we allow the Light of Jesus, into our lives - people will see Christ in us, through our thoughts, words, and deeds. Refining is a process for us, and God does the hard work if we let Him.

No one knew this better than St Brigid of Ireland, whose feast day was yesterday. She was born in the year 454 and was baptized by St. Patrick. Brigid was a bold witness to Christ, and started many churches and a monastery. Before she became a nun, Brigid got into all kinds of trouble with her father -- because she kept giving away her family's food and belongings to the poor. In light of this trouble in her family, she could have been burdened down with guilt -- but things worked out in the end for her, as she had total trust in God. She lived confident of God's cleansing power. She was filled with the Light of Christ, the refining fire, every minute of every day. In fact, at her monastery in Kildare, Ireland there is a perpetual flame -- they keep a fire going 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, as a reminder of Christ's Light never going out for us in our lives. Where there is God there is Light, where there is God there is fire. Where there is God's refining fire, we are cleansed and made whole to do the work of the Lord.

In our Sunday worship, we are cleansed, we are purified by God's refining fire. We always pray the confession (BCP p. 360) after the Prayers of the People -- before we receive Jesus in Communion. It is at this specific time of Confession that we ask, and are granted God's forgiveness of our sins. There is only one problem with this, and it is not God's problem, it is ours. We do not forgive ourselves. We cannot fully receive Christ's Light and be refined by Him if we don't truly believe that God makes us clean. John said in his first letter, :"***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***It says in Isaiah (43) Hebrews (8:12;10:17) , ***“I will remember their sins...no more.”*** God really does purify us, and we are given a new start, new life in Him.

Our Offertory Hymn, which is an insert in your bulletin, captures today's message. Let's read the words together now, as we close this sermon time: "**Purify my heart. Let me be as gold and precious silver. Purify my heart. Let me be as gold, pure gold. Refiner's fire. My heart's one desire Is to be holy. Set apart for You, Lord. I choose to be holy. Set apart for You, my Master. Ready to do Your will. Purify my heart. Cleanse me from within. And make me holy Purify my heart. Cleanse me from my sin, deep within."**

Allow God to purify you so that you may life for Him. Be filled with His Light and Love today. Amen.