

## Presentation in the Temple 2nd February

Luke 2

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God.....

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Law specified that 40 days after childbirth the mother needed to be purified (Leviticus 12:1-8) and the firstborn child was to be offered to the Lord. Given the significance of Simeon's song of praise (the *Nunc Dimittis*) this scene formed an important part of the iconography of the Life of Christ in both East and West. Because Simeon refers to the child as "a light to lighten the Gentiles" this feast is also referred to as Candlemas. It has been observed since at least the 4<sup>th</sup> c in Jerusalem with processions, and blessing candles to be used throughout the coming year. The pilgrim nun Egeria, who visited the Holy Land between 381 and 384, wrote that "all go in procession, and all things are done in order with great joy, just as at Easter." It was also a time for special sermons to be preached, and at least five by early Church Fathers from the mid 4<sup>th</sup> to early 5<sup>th</sup> c have survived.

The focus in painting is usually on Simeon about to receive the Child from Mary, or holding Him in his arms. As much music has been composed for the *Nunc Dimittis*, it is appropriate that a very early mss from East Anglia (c 1310) uses it for an initial letter above the sung notation.



Not much later Ambrogio Lorenzetti gives us a sense of the interior of the Temple in a sumptuous altarpiece. (c 1325) Notice the scroll held by Anna, an allusion to the prophecies of the Messiah from the Old Testament which both Anna and Simeon evoke.



Among the grave, simple frescoes which the Dominican Fra Angelico and his assistants painted on the walls of fellow monks' cells in San Marco in Florence, Cell 10 depicts the Presentation (c 1450-52).

The scene is witnessed by two Dominican saints, Peter of Verona (martyred 1252) and Catherine of Siena, in a visionary/contemplative atmosphere often suggested in Fra Angelico's work.



### **St Anskar (Ansgar) (801-865) 4<sup>th</sup> February "Apostle of the North"**

Although he is known as St Anskar "of Sweden" this missionary saint was born and educated in France. Harold, King of Denmark who was in exile became a Christian and on his return to Scandinavia took Anskar with him. After evangelistic work in Sweden he was appointed Bishop of Hamburg, and later given jurisdiction over Denmark, Sweden and Norway as Archbishop of Bremen. This was a period of Viking invasions and there was much work to do in assisting refugees as well as preaching and teaching. In 845 the Danes raided Hamburg, and all of the church furnishings and books were destroyed.

Anskar is always shown supporting a church. The painting below (1475) is by Hans Bornemann (1420-1474) who spent most of his working life in Hamburg, and the church resembles the saint's first building in that city. The donor, who was identified by a sentence on the frame revealed by recent cleaning was "the venerable Magister Johan Middelman". Many churches in Scandinavia – including the 19<sup>th</sup> c Cathedral of Copenhagen – are named for St Anskar, and statues of him stand in public squares in Hamburg and Copenhagen.

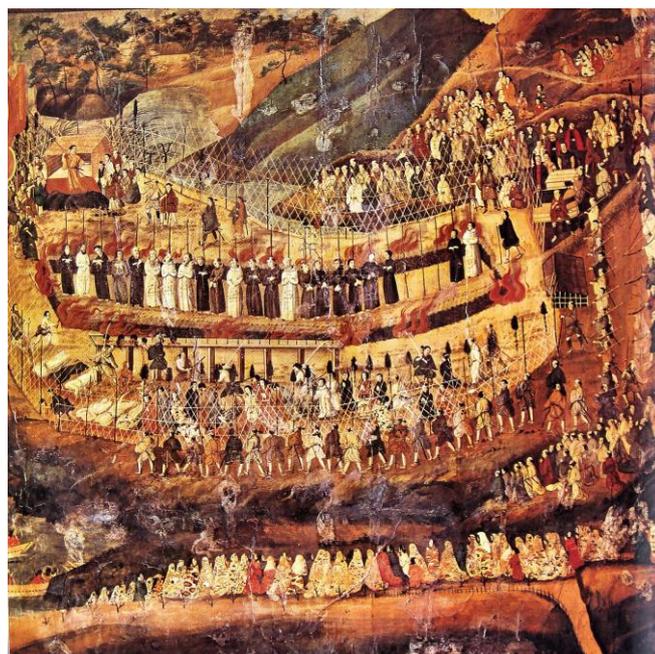


## The Twenty Six Martyrs of Nagasaki 5<sup>th</sup> February

The earliest missionaries who sought to take the Gospel to Japan faced many difficulties – long established culture, local power struggles, and the economic and political rivalries of the European powers seeking to establish bases in the country. In the first forty years, from the arrival of St Francis Xavier and other Jesuits in the 1540s there was support from the local *daimyos* (rulers) and many were converted en masse due to this backing. It is estimated that there were perhaps up to 500,000 Christians, particularly around Nagasaki, the port area where Europeans were permitted to trade. However, as centralized power was assumed by the Tokugawa shogunate, and the colonial aims of the Europeans became more obvious, restrictions on Christianity were put in place, with a complete ban in place in 1587. The authorities aimed to ensure that individuals renounced their beliefs, and to this end used torture and demands to trample on images of Christ – the so-called *fumi-e*, usually made of bronze. This ceremony was demanded annually in the Nagasaki area into the 19<sup>th</sup> c. The surviving examples show wear from their usage.



On February 5, 1597, 26 persons were executed as Christians at Nagasaki. They were tied to crosses and then stabbed. They included local Franciscan tertiaryaries, and Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries from abroad, including Mexico.



Anonymous Japanese painting c 1600-1650

In all, perhaps 400 individuals were martyred before the final expulsion of Christians in the 1630s. Japan had only the most minimal contacts with the West until the arrival of Perry's fleet in 1853, yet so – called "hidden Christians" had continued for over 200 years, meeting in secret and passing on the teachings and oral versions of the Bible.

A museum, containing artifacts related to the early Christians, was erected on the site of the 1597 executions in 1962. The bronze cross shaped relief containing life size images of the 26 is the work of Yasutake Funakoshi. Three of those executed were young boys as shown in the relief. Two churches are also part of the complex.

