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One of the brothers Grimm's shortest fairy tales, and the last published in their collection, turns out to be one of the most enigmatic. The 184-word English translation of "The Golden Key" tells about a boy who found a key — and then the treasure chest it opened. The tale stops just when the boy has given the key one turn. The "no-ending ending" leaves it to the reader's imagination to bring it to a conclusion — or not.

This tale can offer us a mental context for today's celebration of the feast of the Presentation.

Only Luke and Matthew tell us about Jesus before his public ministry, and their stories don't agree. After the Nativity, Luke recounts the circumcision, the Presentation in the Temple and the family's return to Nazareth and, finally, the family's adventure with 12-year-old Jesus lost and found.

What made the story of the Presentation important enough for Luke to include it in his Gospel?

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

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Malachi 3:1-4

Psalm 24

Hebrews 2:14-18

Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

In this incident, Luke must have heard the resonances of Malachi's prediction of the Lord coming into the Temple. Malachi promises that God's presence in the Temple will be overwhelming: "Who will endure? ... Who can stand? ... Like a refiner's fire ... he will purify the sons of Levi." This is definitely a good news/bad news vision.

Luke describes Jesus' first appearance in the Temple far more gently. The ritual reason for the visit had less to do with Jesus' dedication to God than with Mary's [ritual purification](#) 40 days after giving birth. But, as in her encounter with Elizabeth and Zachariah, this scene symbolized the fulfillment of Israel's hopes and another step over the threshold opening to God's new future.

The aged prophet Simeon followed the Spirit's prompting to go to the Temple on the very day that Mary, Joseph and Jesus appeared there. The revelation that he would not see death before seeing the Christ depicts him as another representative of all of Israel who never lost hope in God.

At the same time, Simeon's prophecy indicated that the road ahead would be full of conflict.

While Malachi spoke about the terrifying events surrounding God's appearance, Simeon speaks of very different results: The child would bring the rise and fall of many, there would be great sorrow and people's inner thoughts would be revealed.

We might say that Malachi envisioned a process of searing purification. Simeon predicted something much more interior and future-oriented. By speaking of the heart, Simeon indicated that this child would force personal and then communal choices that would upend the world as people knew it. This was no return to a golden past, but the opening to an unimaginable future.

The other character at hand, Anna, represents all who would accept Christ. A prophet herself, she foresaw what this child signified. Unlike Simeon who spoke directly to Jesus' parents, she "spoke about the child *to all* who were hoping for God's future."

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We need to recognize Anna as the first evangelist: a prophet who saw fulfillment and was thus the first to be preaching, "The reign of God is at hand!" She doesn't get a lot of fame, probably because she was a woman. Her testimony, like that of those who discovered the empty tomb, would be taken as of little account.

This is a delightful story with all sorts of implications, sub-themes and invitations to wonder. It is also open-ended. Simeon said his piece, Anna proclaimed Jesus, but all we hear at the end is that Mary and Joseph took the highly acclaimed child Jesus home to Nazareth. The first turn of the key.

As we end the 40-day Christmas season, this feast reminds us that all the wonderful stories we've heard have yet to come to fruition — and that their evolution will not be simple or painless. The Letter to the Hebrews says it this way: "Through death, he

will ... free those who for fear of death have been subject to slavery." Taking on death is the hardest thing any person can do — and is the font of the greatest freedom one can enjoy.

Today, the church celebrates the [World Day for Consecrated Life](#) — a celebration of those who have received and accepted the invitation to live in the freedom of a celibate, vowed life. Anna in the Temple might be the first patron of religious life as one whose life of prayer made her a prophet impelled to proclaim what she had seen and heard.

Luke gives us a story without an ending. Good news/bad news. Christ's birth and reception by the simple made the first turn of the golden key. Now it is ours to dare the second turn and exercise the humility to be open to wonderful and challenging treasures we have never imagined.

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