

Readings for Candlemas

2nd February 2025

First Reading: Malachi 3:1-5

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of Hosts.

Second Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18

Since the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Gospel: St Luke 2:22-40

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 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

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. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 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, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

A Reflection for Candlemas

from Rev’d David Higgon

Keeping the Light Shining

Most of you will have noticed the snowdrops poking their heads through the winter snow. For me they are a reminder that even when the days are short and dark, when the weather is wretched, that if we look carefully, we can always find signs of joy and hope. In some places snowdrops are known as Candlemas bells and they are one of the first flowers we notice in the New Year; they are a sign of new growth and of new beginnings and of the promise of spring, and to be a source of encouragement in knowing that this tiny flower is able to survive the deepest of frosts and the darkest of days. In the Gaelic world, yesterday was the feast of St Bride which marks the midpoint of the Gaelic winter, and it too is a celebration of the signs of new growth and of new beginnings in the midst of the harshness of winter. The flower associated with St Bride is the dandelion or as it is known in Gaelic, *Breànan Bride*, and it too, like the snow drop, is a welcome sign to us of God’s continual presence even in the darkest days. The emergence of the humble dandelion and snowdrop are a reminder that all living things are of God’s creation, and that this earth is sacred, it is holy. The earth is beautiful, and we need to care for it and for all who live on it, and to long for its healing.

Today’s feast is popularly known as Candlemas because candles were brought into church to be blessed, perhaps reflecting the words of Simeon in our Gospel reading. In the church calendar it is known as the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, and in days gone by it was also known as the Purification of St Mary the Virgin’. Both names relate to the rituals that were required in accordance with Jewish law, those of the ritual of purification of a mother after birth, and of the ritual dedication of a first-born child to God. Mary and Joseph faithfully carry out the duties laid on them by their religion, bringing to the Temple the sacrifice demanded by the law and in bringing their son to be dedicated to the Lord.

This act of dedication is celebrated by Simeon and Anna, two older people who are a source of encouragement and affirmation to Mary and Joseph, in their recognition of the role the couple are to play in God’s work of salvation. In the years, before the birth of Jesus, they had kept the light of hope shining in the Temple through their faith and

devotion. They were patiently waiting for the Messiah and at last they recognised the messiah in the infant Jesus. It's Simeon's words that link this feast with candles and light.

Now Lord let your servant go in peace, your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people; a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

As Christians, we light candles as tokens of prayer, and they have a special place in the liturgies of Advent, Christmas, Easter and in baptism. They provide a focus for the faith and hope of believers. In our advent wreath the central candle was lit at midnight mass to symbolise the light of Christ coming into the world. That candle has been alight through all our services through Christmas and Epiphany, to symbolise that God came down to earth to live amongst us in the person of Jesus Christ. It is what is called 'the incarnation', where God has become human flesh. Through epiphany we have celebrated how the light of Christ as God incarnate was revealed to the Magi, how it was revealed in his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan, at the wedding at Cana, and today in the presentation of Christ in the temple. Candlemas is symbolically about ensuring that the light of Christ continues to shine in us and in our church throughout the rest of the year.

The light of the incarnation illuminates our journey with Jesus through the darkest of days. It is a light that shines even in the darkest places of torture and death, in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross at Golgotha. Yet even in that darkest of events, the light is not extinguished. We will light the Easter Candle on Easter morning, as a symbol of new growth and new beginnings and of the hope and joy we experience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, looked forward to the time when 'the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death', and John in his Gospel speaks of Jesus as the true light that gives light to everyone.

It is not surprising therefore that Simeon draws on the imagery of light when he recognises the child Jesus as the Messiah. In the course of his ministry Jesus brings sight to the blind and in so doing describes himself as 'the light of the world.' At his death, darkness covers the earth, but his resurrection comes with the light of dawn. This powerful symbol of light speaks of Jesus' mission to bring healing and hope, to dispel doubt and overcome sin and death. It is not difficult to see how this was worked out in his own life and ministry.

Sometimes it seems hard for us to discern how the light of Christ continues to shine in our own world, dominated by concerns over climate change, war, famine and disease. Are the candles we light today merely lights to bring us comfort, but are without the power to overcome the darkness that surrounds us? Simeon in his words to Mary, points to the controversy and suffering that lie in store for Jesus and his mother. The dedication of Jesus to God in the temple brings a blessing, but it also demands sacrifice. It is a blessing that demands sacrifice for us also. As well as defining himself as light, Jesus also calls us to be light. 'You are the light of the world,' Jesus tells us.

We are called not simply to gaze at his light and draw comfort from it, but to receive it in ourselves and reflect it in our lives, in our words and in our actions, and like Simeon and Anna, to be a source of encouragement and affirmation to others. The light of Christ is seen everywhere where his work of promoting healing, justice and reconciliation is carried on.

Embracing the light of Christ is not just about candles in church, it is about shining the light of Christ in the dark places in our own community, and in our world, by continuing to speak and work for new growth and new beginnings, to

be lights of joy and hope, and by continuing the work of Jesus, of promoting healing, and of advocating justice for the oppressed and for all living things, and to be a source of reconciliation in a world in need of healing.