

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 2 February 2025 - Presentation of Christ (Candlemas)

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Malachi 3. 1-5; Psalm 24 [1-6] 7-10; Hebrews 2.14-18; Luke 2.22-40

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Canon Fiona Brampton, Bishop's Advisor for World Mission and Priest in Charge, North Leightonstone

In many churches, the Christmas crib is still up, full of its cuddly sheep and reminders of Christmas. At the end of today's service, it will come down and be put away safely for another 10 months. I was recently told by one churchwarden that there was a minor panic when no one could find the baby Jesus – and then they discovered he'd been safely stored in the roof of the stable when he was packed away last Candlemas.

Today we have the last story of Jesus' infancy. Joseph and Mary are fulfilling the law, which said that between 33 and 40 days after the birth of a child, the woman must go to the priest to be purified. Also, a firstborn son belongs to God, and so must be redeemed, by the offering of a sacrifice.

In these short 18 verses, we learn many things. It's unusual amongst Gospel narratives that all the main characters in the story have names. In so many of the Gospel stories the lead figures are 'a woman' 'a child' 'a blind man'. Here we have their names. This moment is not to be forgotten – and these people will always be remembered by name.

Mary and Joseph were clearly poor. That might be because they'd been away from home for nearly 2 months, and away from business. Or maybe the trade of a carpenter didn't command the same kind of wealth that many other occupations around Jerusalem commanded. They brought 'two turtle doves or two young pigeons' – the offering of a poor person.

We always assume that Simeon was old, although the text doesn't actually tell us that. We are told that he had been promised by God that he wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah. That was some kind of promise! It had been 400 years since the last prophecy and promise of a Messiah, and even longer since Isaiah and Micah had been given their words. And yet, this faithful man had been waiting, full of expectation that God would fulfil his promise and not let him down. Every day, young and not so young parents would have come to the Temple with their young children. The same Spirit who had promised Simeon he would see the Messiah, prompted Simeon to come to the Temple, to see in this couple and in this baby the promise of God.

However, in the fulfilment of the promise, all that Simeon understood was turned upside down. We know that Simeon had been promised he would see the Messiah. I wonder what

he was waiting for? He could so easily have missed Jesus as he was caught up with his own expectations. No one was looking for the Messiah amongst one of the many families making a poor person's offering of thanksgiving? Simeon responded to the prompting of the Spirit. We don't get any 'back story' of any internal fight. Maybe it went on – but it didn't win out. The Spirit was saying 'go', so he went.

Simeon didn't hesitate. He approached the family and took the child into his arms. He realised that this was the Messiah and gave thanks to God for the light that had come to be a revelation to all the world – not just to the Hebrew people. He, Simeon, could die in peace – God had kept his promise after all.

I wonder – was it the use of the word 'light' that suddenly changes the nature and focus of the scene. Somehow, as Simeon took the child into his arms and began to sing his hymn of praise to God, he was aware that this Messiah's destiny was to be something much greater than perhaps he'd ever imagined. As we hear Simeon's words, we too realise that the Messiah's home isn't amongst the cuddly sheep. His home would be in becoming that light, that leads to a restlessness (foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.). God's salvation is found in the work that the Messiah has come to do – to bring the light. 'Who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears', Malachi prophesied. Think for a moment of the clarity of light in some of our coldest days – that real photographer's light, where everything is shown up almost more clearly than we've ever seen before. This is the sort of light where nothing can be hidden, where everything is brought out into the open. This baby, this Messiah, will bring all things into the open. His light will burn like a fire, changing all that he touches. Few will be able to withstand it.

Simeon realised that the Messiah too isn't simply a 'nice concept'. It's world changing – but it involves sacrifice. The baby will pierce his mother's heart like a sword.

Any sacrifice, whether to say 'thank you' or to say 'sorry', came with a cost. Even though Joseph and Mary were making the poor person's sacrifice, it cost them a lot of money. They would have had to give up things to make it. In this encounter, everyone becomes aware that the sacrifice, the offering of the first son, will cost an awful lot more than simply two young pigeons. There's the strange moment of God being offered the eternal Word in dedication. But there's also the human – of Simeon, and then the parents realising that, whatever they've faced up until now, there's so much more to come. The Messiah himself will be sacrificed to bring the light of revelation and the glory of God's people.

As we know, as Jesus showed people up for what they really were, and challenged them to change in the light of his purifying fire, he didn't let things go to their logical conclusion, where the whole world is judged and lost. He became the fulfilment of what was promised in this Temple, what was promised from the beginning of time - a gift of love for the world – not giving as little as could get away with, or even as much as could afford. He gave even more than that – his life, with the potential of ripping apart the fundamental relationship with his father, as he bore the full weight, in love, of our mistakes, our sins and selfishness. For none of that has any place in the presence of God.

Candlemas stands between the nativity and the cross. Sometimes, Candlemas and Ash Wednesday happen in the same week. This year we have 32 days to prepare ourselves for

the change of tone, before the 40 days of the Lenten fast come to challenge us as well. Perhaps it's 32 days to remember the other person in the Temple, the widow Anna, who through the poverty of her widowhood had found herself praying for others for many decades. She too sees this baby – and sees the gift that she has been longing for – the gift of hope and joy and peace – and, like the shepherds before her, tells everyone what she has seen, and that this child is the one who will change the world. We have 32 days more to sing of the gift that has been given to us to everyone who will hear, and to prepare ourselves.

For, as we come face to face with the light of Christ, as we put the baby back away safely and turn to the cross, we too will be changed. The encounter with Christ will get rid of all the stuff that gets in our way. We are challenged by the light to see ourselves as we really are – not just pointing the finger at others, however famous our infamous they are, but to see ourselves with our faults.

We are challenged to give not just 'what we can get away with' but even more than we can afford, beyond life itself. Our faith isn't just part of another club but something that demands all our very selves.

But, like Anna and Simeon, it will also fill us with so much joy that we too will be able to say 'now I can depart in peace' – but keep telling everyone what we have seen before that final encounter with the light is given to us.

As we move from baby to adult, from crib to cross, we can join in the words of the famous hymn 'Here in the love of Christ I stand; here in the death of Christ I live; here in the power of Christ I'll stand.'

Activity

It's worth considering whether you will be having a candlelit procession as part of the service, or candles at the end of the service.

Why not encourage members of the church – children or older people – to pack away the crib figures during the last hymn of the morning, and maybe to leave a cross standing in the stable before.

The Church of England 'Times and Seasons' material (for The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple) has two alternative closing processions which make a really good symbolic action of taking the light that was in the crib both to us and to the place of baptism and then for us to take out into the world.

Suggested intercessions *

These intercessions use the Taize chant 'The Lord is my light' in between each petition. It can be sung or said.

Let us pray.

We draw near to Jesus, our Saviour and Friend,
confident that he will hear us
as we bring our prayers and concerns, saying,

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

We thank you for your family, the Church,
and for our part in its fellowship.
We pray for Christians throughout the world,
especially those whose work is difficult
or whose lives are at risk for your sake.
May they know your strength and peace, day by day.
**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

We thank you for the world you have created,
and for our pleasure in its beauty and resources.
We pray for all who are responsible for its care,
especially those seeking to repair the damages
caused by greed and selfishness.
May we play our part in acting as wise stewards
of what has been given.

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

We thank you for our homes,
and for the comfortable lives we enjoy.
We pray for the homeless, the unemployed,
the neglected and the abused,
especially those we see in our own community.
May we show your care and compassion
as we minister to them.

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

We thank you for our families and friends
and for the joys of human love.
We pray for the lonely and friendless,
especially those who have been hurt
and wounded by those closest to them.
May we bring them the warmth and security of your love.

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

We thank you for health and strength,
and for the opportunities you give us to enjoy this life.
We pray for those who are sick in body or mind,
especially those we know in this community.
May we bring to their lives your healing touch.

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

We thank you for your promise
to hear us when we pray in faith.

As we see your hand at work,
may we grow in confidence of your faithfulness
and rejoice in your mighty power.
Lord, accept our thanks,
and receive our prayers,
for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation,
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

*Source not known

Suggested hymns/songs

In Christ alone – obviously picks up the last words of the homily

Mary and Joseph (came to the Temple) (Andrew Platt)- Singing the Faith

Through the years of watchful waiting (Thomas Winkinson)- Singing the Faith

Faithful vigil ended (Timothy Dudley-Smith) many different hymn books

Lord the light of your love is shining (Shine, Jesus, shine) (Graham Kendrick)

When candles are lighted on Candlemas day (Elizabeth J Cosnett) found across the internet.

This little light of mine

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

The Lord is my light, my light and salvation (Taize)

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)