

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 1 February 2026 - 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 Michael Wilcockson, Assistant Curate - Associate Priest, Linton (Benefice) and Rural Dean of Granta

Piety. Piety does not have a good reputation. A bit like humbleness in the hands of Dickens' 'ever so 'umble' Uriah Heap, it smacks of trying too hard and too self-consciously to be 'religious'. Devotion today doesn't fare much better. It is not a word I hear used much by the younger generation – very few say that they are devoted to their school, or football club or even their friends, though they might use the words loyal or committed.

But even if piety has a bad press, it is what today's Collect and Gospel reading are all about. We have just prayed in the words of the Collect:

'that we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts'

In the Gospel passage Luke stresses the extreme piety of Mary and Joseph who have travelled from Galilee to the Temple (which was not a legal requirement) to perform all the Jewish religious purification rites after the birth of a first born child; Simeon is led by the Holy Spirit to worship and offer his blessing of Jesus in the Temple; and Anna is an outstanding example of piety for Luke calls her a prophetess and, according to rabbinic tradition, there were only seven named Jewish prophetesses before her in the Old Testament. The location of all their devotion is the Temple, the symbol of Jewish piety.

So, what is piety? I am going to borrow a phrase from one of our great 17th Century Anglican divines, Jeremy Taylor, he called piety 'holy intention'. Intention begins deep within us, in the will and from there it shapes our minds and souls and then finally manifests itself in action. For intention to be holy it must be refined and purified through prayer and love of God.

In *Holy Living* (1650) Taylor describes holy intention using a series of powerful images. Holy intention is he says,

as to the actions of a man that which the soul is to the body, or form to its matter, or the root to the tree, or the sun to the world, or the fountain to a river, or the base to a pillar: for without these the body is a dead trunk, the matter is sluggish, the tree is a block, the world is darkness, the river is quickly dry, the pillar rushes into flatness and a ruin; and the action is sinful, or unprofitable and vain.

Taylor offers ten practical ways in which we might develop holy intention. Here are three:

Firstly, every action must begin with prayer; this makes everything we do a gift and an offering to God.

Secondly, all our actions, however trivial, must have no negative desires or ill will.

Thirdly, we must not become so pleased and puffed up with our piety that we seek the admiration of other people or even our own self-praise.

Holy intention is the purification of the soul. The prophet Malachi dramatically compares the purification of the soul to the fire which the silversmith uses to extract silver from impure silver (Malachi 3:2-3). You will recall Luke's description of the birth of the Church in Acts of the Apostles when the first Christians experienced the refiner's fire at Pentecost through the purifying power of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire.

We see holy intention like this in every character that Luke so carefully introduces us to when Jesus is presented in the Temple. Mary and Joseph are introduced as an example of simple Galilean piety by their sacrifice of two turtle doves; only the rich could afford to sacrifice a lamb and a turtle dove.

Luke introduces Simeon as being a 'righteous and devout' person looking forward to the messianic age. His prayer, the *Nunc Dimittis*, reveals his holy intention. There is no hint of self-importance in what he says to Mary and Joseph as he nestles the baby Jesus in his arms. His sense of servanthood is emphasised in his use of a very unusual Greek word, 'despotes', meaning 'sovereign master'. His request is that Jesus, his sovereign, would now release him from his servant's duties.

The pious widow Anna, who spends all her days in the Temple precincts in prayer and fasting, speaks for all those ordinary people who 'were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38), the time when God's peace would rule in the hearts and minds of all.

Much later in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus chose purity to be one of the characteristics of the Christian disciple: 'Blessed are the pure in heart,' he said, 'for they will see God' (Matthew 5:8). Purity like piety, devotion and holy intention is expressed throughout the story of Christ's presentation in the Temple.

Take a moment after this service to re-read the story and reflect on what Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna might tell you about your own religious life. If the words purity or piety don't really speak to you, then perhaps Jeremy Taylor's idea of holy intention may do so.

Additional Material for the homily

Having looked to Simeon and Anna, and seen their holy intention, we might also (on this Feast Day) follow their eyes as they look upon the baby Christ. Looking upon Jesus, Simeon sees in this babe the 'Light that gives light to the Gentiles' and the 'Glory of God's people, Israel'.

Holy intention, piety, comes first and foremost from seeing aright, from looking at Jesus and seeing the glorious light of God within. Here in Christ is the fire that might burn up the

chaff within each of us. Here in Christ is the light that lightens the darkness in our hearts. Here in Christ is the light that shines for *all* people; a light that excludes none, welcomes all, makes room for each.

Only by looking, with Simeon and Anna, into these searing eyes of love, may our desires – our intentions – be made holy, even as Christ the true light is holy.

Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is (Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna)? I wonder why that is?
- [Light and hold a candle] I wonder how Mary felt when Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and said he would become a light to all people in the world?
- I wonder how you feel about Mary and Joseph offering a sacrifice of two turtle doves in the Temple for the birth of their son, Jesus?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what the story tells you about being 'pure in spirit'?
- I wonder what Simeon meant when he said to Mary that 'a sword will pierce your own soul too'?
- I wonder what we can learn about God or the Holy Spirit in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Collect for the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Almighty and ever-living God,
clothed in majesty,
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple,
in substance of our flesh:
grant that we may be presented to you
with pure and clean hearts,
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

O Lord Jesus Christ, as a child you were presented in the Temple and received with joy by Simeon and Anna as Redeemer of Israel: mercifully grant that we like them, may be guided by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge and love you until the end of our lives. Amen

Church of South India

Let the flame of your love never be quenched in our hearts, O Lord. Waking or sleeping, living or dying, let us delight in your presence. Let the flame of your love brighten our souls and illumine our path and let the majesty of your glory be our joy, our life and our strength now and for ever. Amen

Johann Arndt (1555-162)

O Father, give us the humility which
Realizes its ignorance,
Admits its mistakes,
Recognizes its need,
Welcomes advice,
Accepts rebuke.
Help us always
To praise rather than to criticize,
To sympathize rather than to condemn.
To encourage rather than to discourage,
To build rather than to destroy,
And to think of people at their best rather than at their worst.
This we ask for thy name's sake. Amen

William Barclay (from The SPCK Book of Common Prayer p. 215)

A prayer to bless candles

God our Father, whose Son was revealed to Simeon as the light of the nations, and the glory of Israel, let these candles (+) be to us a sign of his light and presence, that, guided by the Holy Spirit, we may live by the light of faith until we come to the light of glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Candlemas procession

All A light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled.

All A light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people.

All A light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

All A light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.

All Amen.

All A light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

from *Common Worship: Times and Seasons*

Suggested hymns/songs

Blest are the pure in heart
Lord Jesus think on me
Breathe on me, breath of God
When candles art lighted on Candlemas Day
A glory dawns in every dark place
Shine, Jesus, shine
King of glory, King of peace
Restore, O Lord, the honour of your name
Singe we of the blessed Mother
A man there lived in Galilee
Purify my heart
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness
Light of the world, true light divine
He's got the whole world, in His hand,
Father, we love you, we worship and adore you
From Heaven you came, helpless babe
Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning

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:

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

See also, *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* pp. 194-207