

Candle-mass 2019 Feb 3rd

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen, **please** sit down.

Candle-mass falls at a funny time of year, the nights are getting shorter, snowdrops and daffodils are out, there is a **promise** of Spring to come, and yet we know we can still have icy weather, snow and **perhaps** even another beast from the east.

There is an old English saying: if Candle-mass be fair and bright, winter will have another fight, if Candle-mass brings cloud and rain, winter won't come again. I wonder what the weather will do today! And, will the rhyme work because Candle-mass should be celebrated on 2nd but we didn't think you would want to come to Church yesterday to celebrate it so the Church moved the celebration to today.

At Candle-mass we become more aware of the imagery of the candles, representing the light of Christ, as Simeon says

"To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of thy **people** Israel". As we Christians gather here today and then go out into the world, we carry this light with us.

In our first reading the **prophet** Malachi tells us that the light should radiate through us to all whom we meet.

In our Gospel reading we hear how Mary and Joseph **present** Jesus to the temple to receive the light of God in his life and this **passage** to me is full of Ps today- not the Birds Eye frozen kind but Ps made up of **Presentation, Praise, Purification, Prophecy, Patience, Perseverance, Prayer, Promise and Peace**, there will be others I haven't listed here. Listen carefully throughout, there are 45 P words in this sermon!

Both Simeon and Anna, in the temple showed a number of these qualities. Simeon, we read was devout - he put God central in his life, we often think of him being old although it doesn't say anywhere that he was, just that God had **promised** that he would not die until he had seen the Christ, and we don't know when and how God had told him this. It was because he put God central in his life that he had been chosen.

We know that Anna was old, she was 84 and in the temple day and night fasting and **praying** and had done since her husband had died many years before, fully dedicated to God she led a life of **perseverance, praise and prayer**.

Through these two God's **promise** was answered, just think, in the temple that day there must have been; hundreds of **people** going about their business and yet God brought the baby Jesus, Simeon and Anna into the same **place** at the same time.

I wonder if, for just a moment, that Simeon was disappointed..God's answer came in the form of a tiny baby?

What was he expecting? A warrior on a white horse with an army marching behind?

If we fast forward 30+ years later we will see Jesus whipping the traders as he removes them from 'his fathers' house.

You may have heard me talk about the various trips I take to McDonalds! I enjoy a children's happy meal and now they have started to do mini wraps..well thats me sold... between Christmas and New Year I treated myself to a trip to Cambridge and for lunch, of course, had a wrap. It was cool so I sat in rather than on the bench outside Kings college and noticed, between the tourists, local **people** escaping from the hustle and bustle of the day, -a couple of carers with a young man in a wheelchair, sat opposite me, they looked comfortable, like this was a regular occurrence. Normally in **places** like this, full of travellers and busyness, **people** don't interact, but that day I was lucky to experience a glimpse of heaven on earth. A Simeon moment, when another local lady came in with her new baby dressed in pink and showed her to the carers. They got up hugged the new mum and cooed over the baby, then a group of Chinese tourists stopped and said hello, and then some French students joined in, and more, and for just a few moments the busyness of the day stopped and I could almost see how it was when Simeon lifted the baby Jesus and **praised** God. There, in McDonalds, in Cambridge a special moment. A Simeon moment or even a Mary moment. Let's not forget Mary, **proudly** carrying her firstborn son, her special son, trying, still, to make sense of how he came to be and everything that had happened since, and this journey now, to the Temple.

She and Joseph doing what was right, doing what was expected. **Perhaps** nervously entering the Temple...would their two doves be offering enough? What were they supposed to do...When Simeon approached them and greets them with those words...which, at first sound harmless enough "Lord, now you are dismissing your servant in **peace**, according your word for my eyes have seen your salvation".... but then he turns to her, looks her in the eye and says...

"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."

Mary could be in no doubt, since the visit of the Angel, her meeting with Elizabeth, Joseph's initial rejection then acceptance, their journey by donkey to Bethlehem, shepherds, wise men and now this- a life of joy but also a life of **pain**.

A remarkable life, but also a life of ups and downs, a life not so much unlike ours. You may have approached this New Year, 2019, with anticipation and

joy, or may be you are at the other end of the scale, scared, or in despair and worried.

Sometimes the light that everyone says is at the end of the tunnel seems along way way and not even visible, but the good news is that that light, the light of Jesus that shone in the Temple on that first Candle-mass day has never failed and remains with us, here today.

Today Christmas and Epiphany come to an end. The light in the crib is turned off and the figures **packed** away. We turn away from or celebrations of Christ birth and look towards Lent and our **preparations** for his **passion**, death and resurrection. For us , as it was for Mary, this is a day when joy and **pain** collide. But it is also a day when we light candles, candles to remind us of the “light to reveal God to all the nations...and for glory to your **people** Israel.” Candles to remind us that Emmanuel, God is with us, always even when we are downhearted or feeling hopeless.

Candlemas is the **promise** of light, Jesus' love and light shining in the darkness.

Will you join me as we **prepare** to turn away from the crib and face the cross to start to think of what we can do in the 40 days of Lent which will soon be upon us. Will this be a time to dig a little deeper, to **pray** or read a little more , or may be to make a new commitment or connection within your own **personal** faith.

Perhaps today is the day when you and I will decide to change something, **perhaps** to listen to what God is asking from us or **perhaps** to know what it is we are waiting for. If we keep our eyes and ears open for Simeon moments, and share them with others, then our lives can become richer, as Jesus our friend and saviour lights our way ahead. Amen