

**Sermon 31 January 2021 Candlemas/The Presentation of Christ.
Reverend Irene**

Today we celebrate the feast of Candlemas, (Feb 2nd) when we look forward to Spring, new life and the lighter days. In the past, before the invention of electricity, candles were the main source of light in our homes, so traditionally, candles were blessed in church on this day – hence the name Candlemas.

Candlemas is also the end of the Epiphany season, so those of you who kept your crib out can now pack it away with the other decorations, as we say goodbye to the 40 days of Christmas and begin to look forward to the adult life and ministry of Jesus.

As in life, when one thing ends, another begins.

Today is also referred to as The Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

According to Jewish law, every first-born male must be redeemed at the temple at the age of 40 days and a sacrifice of a lamb, a young pigeon and turtle dove as an offering, if you could not afford that you brought two turtle doves and two young pigeons, as Mary and Joseph did. They were greeted at the Temple by two older worshippers who had been waiting and praying for many years, three generations coming together. Simeon, a devout man who had been told that God's anointed would be revealed to him before his death and Anna daughter of Phanuel, a widow and prophetess, in her eighties.

These two elderly worshipers attended the Temple daily to pray and to wait with open eyes and hearts for something special to happen, the coming of a saviour. Their patience was rewarded when an ordinary, poor couple came with their baby son in their arms. Amongst all the others in the temple, Simeon and Anna noticed this one child in the crowd. What was it about Jesus that made Simeon realise a promise had been fulfilled, making him sing his song? What did it mean to Anna after many years of widowhood and faithful daily prayer, to see at last new hope and light revealed in the presence of that child?

We don't know the answer to these questions but we do know that they **saw** because they were faithfully looking. They saw because their eyes were open; in the words of Simeon's song, - the Nunc Dimittis, " My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared". A Light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel".

They saw Christ revealed, not just for themselves, but for all of us, through their open eyes and expectant hearts.

Simeon and Anna were patient, they understood what it was to wait, theirs was not a life of busyness in a world with no time to watch and pray; they gave God something special and were rewarded, they gave him their time and patience, and in him they saw his light- the light of Jesus.

If we were gathering in church today, we would each have a candle, to represent the light that is Jesus, the light that guides us in life and the light we use to find God in others; because God is all around us if we only look.

He is in the faces of the lost and lonely, he is in the hands of the doctors, nurses and scientists. God is in the good deeds of a friend and the smile of a stranger.

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When we are too busy with living, and don't open eyes and hearts to what is around us, we can easily dismiss the sacred and the divine that is in our midst, and we miss out on the joy that was shared by Simeon and Anna, the joy of our salvation.

So light a candle in your homes today to celebrate Candlemas, then sit and reflect on the birth of Jesus and the ending of Christmas Season, also on the events of the past year as we approach the Spring and Lent.

As we turn away from a year of gloom and despair, we wait for what is yet to come in this long battle against Covid 19. Winter is not yet over, the journey ahead may be challenging, but we know that God is with us, in you and in me, and in the most unlikely of people and places. Our challenge is to show people the light of Christ that shines through our actions and encourage others to find God's light in themselves.

Amen