

Sermon: Candlemas – Luke 2:22-40 – 2nd February 2020 (10.00 Service)

Candlemas is rich with symbolism and meaning – and a good example of how sacred and secular have forged and come together over time.

Candlemas is when the Church celebrates the time when Jesus was presented in the temple – as we have heard – but there is also a lot of folklore attached to Candlemas.

- Candlemas is one of the unofficial dates that mark the changing of the seasons – the beginning of Spring (2 February), along with
 - Candlemas was a day when preparation of the winter earth for new spring planting would begin (it was called the 'awakening')
 - Snowdrops known as the Candlemas Bells - a sign of hope – and bringing snowdrops indoors at Candlemas is a symbolic way of purifying our home.

It also marks the end of the Nativity – where we put away the crib and begin to turn our attention to the journey to the cross....

Mary was reminded of what was to come, wasn't she – of her own cross that she would bear for the sake of bearing God's light that shines for us in the person of Jesus – her beloved son. While he seemed like other children of God's promise – like Samson and Samuel – Jesus would go beyond them and bring healing and light to bear for everyone – not just a few select – but at a cost...

She was reminded of this by Simeon - and I would like to spend more time looking at the man and woman involved – Simeon and Anna - it is only in Luke's Gospel that we find them and only in this reading that dwells on their story.

Simeon wasn't an important priest-figure in the temple – but simply a devout Jew perhaps a similar age to Anna's 84 years. Along with Anna as witness, Simeon has become the voice to proclaim the good news of salvation and redemption that will work through Jesus.

Simeon and Anna are people filled with quiet, steadfast joy, nurtured by the wisdom and faith that comes with a long life lived through prayer and trust in God – but this kind of joy would have been formed through really difficult and challenging times of the day probably, socially, politically and culturally – joy preceded most likely by periods of doubt, anxiety, questions – darkness. No human it seems is excused from life's experiences and the patterns of doubt expressed throughout the Bible. But while doubt is the back side of faith – faith is the front face of doubt...

But through it all, the faith of Anna and Simeon has been vindicated and they can rest knowing a sense of hope for better days through the coming of Jesus Christ, the light of the world – God made flesh...

Most churches today have their own Simeon and Anna's as we do at St Peter's. People of long-life who have stories of deep faith and lives led in faithful action, who have that steadfast joy that comes with 'getting through', born out of the most difficult of times – war – bereavement – work struggles – ill health.... You might know such a person – indeed you might be one of those people – people with stories of trust and faith that have held you through the ups and downs.

This reading gives us the opportunity to celebrate the Simeon and Anna's of the church – of our own church. It's easy for churches of the 21st century to major on the issue of not having enough young families and children coming through – but there is a richness that comes from being rooted in faith and abiding in a place for a long time.

Elders can nurture the newer generation who are shown what it means to live within a parish church community. They know what it's like to live under the wings of a church community – a place of sanctuary, peace and fellowship.

The Simeon's and Anna's of churches everywhere realise for themselves that younger presence is crucial in continuing with the work of Christ in his church and community. And our St Peter's is no exception. We too need more hands and feet – we have a big enough heart for Wrecclesham – but we need the labourers to yield the harvest sown through years of prayer, hospitality and love in this place.

Our community are beginning to recognise once again, the benefits of a place of sanctuary and stability such as St Peter's, their parish church – a place they can turn to – and enjoy – without being steamrollered into a faith or religion that is as yet alien to them or frightening for them.

Through the revival of Junior Church and the enthusiasm for Messy Church we can witness that the Church - the body of Christ - is very much alive and well – and will continue to be a proclaimer of God's mission of peace for all – in thought, word and deed...

The whole of Jesus's life and mission – from birth to death - has as its ultimate aim the purpose of bringing to the human experience a sense of God's light and love being with us – of God's peace being with us – and a deep sense of faithful joy at being comforted and strengthened through the doubts and darkness – and a sense of bubbly joy through the good times.

A Gospel of hospitality, welcome and love – and fun – is compelling... We need to do all we can to keep the show on the road – to uphold this place of sanctuary – our 21st century temple where Jesus can be presented in all his glory in all his seasons to God's 21st century people who are longing for light and love who but who are not quite sure how to get it....

Anna and Simeon held the Christ child in their arms but for a moment – but a moment is all it takes for the inner thoughts of one or many to be touched by that heavenly glimpse of hope and peace for the future – a brighter future - that comes through meeting Jesus. Let us work towards bringing the possibility of that glimpse to ourselves and to others through the blessing of a St Peter's faith handed down from generation to generation and the thank God and say with Simeon

'...For mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.....' Amen...

Rev Jacqueline Drake-Smith

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