

The Bride Valley Telephone Service for Sunday 29th January 2023

Candlemas: The presentation of Jesus in the Temple

Prepared by the Reverend Jane Williams and available on 01308 293062

Opening Words:

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation. Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Psalm 24 verses 1-6*

Hymn: In a world where people walk in darkness

1 In a world where people walk in darkness,
let us turn our faces to the light,
to the light of God revealed in Jesus,
to the daystar scattering our night.

*For the light is stronger than the darkness
and the day will overcome the night,
though the shadows linger all around us,
let us turn our faces to the light.*

2 In a world where suffering of the helpless
casts a shadow all along the way,
let us bear the cross of Christ with gladness
and proclaim the dawning of the day.

Chorus

3 Let us light a candle in the darkness,
in the face of death a sign of life;
as a sign of hope where all seemed
hopeless,
as a sign of peace in place of strife.
Chorus

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Invitation to confession

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So let us turn away from sin and turn to the Lord, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Prayers of penitence

Father eternal, giver of light and grace, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour, in what we have thought, in what we have said and done, through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We have wounded your love and marred your image in us. We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past; and lead us out from darkness to walk as children of light. Amen.

Absolution

The almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon and forgiveness of all your sins, time for amendment of life, and the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Collect: Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ, light of the nations and glory of Israel: make your home among us and present us pure and holy to your heavenly Father, your God and our God. Amen.

Readings: Hebrews 2: 14–end

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not

come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “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.” There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Reflection: Waiting on God!

The Bible says that Simeon was a good man who tried hard to follow God’s law. He has some things to teach us about waiting, as he had been waiting for something important for a long, long time. Although he was very old, he hung in there for one reason: he believed that God had told him he would not die before he had seen the Saviour—the Messiah of Israel!

In the 1960s, psychologist Walter Mischel conducted a famous experiment that has come to be known as “The Marshmallow Test.” Groups of 4-year-olds were given one marshmallow each and told that if they waited 20 minutes before eating it, they would receive another. If they ate it without waiting, they would not get any more marshmallows.

Some kids could wait and others could not. The researchers then followed the progress of each child into adolescence and demonstrated that those with the ability to wait were better adjusted and more dependable (as determined by surveys of their parents and teachers), and scored an average of 210 points higher on their SATs.

Some of us would not only have eaten our own marshmallow right away, but would have taken the other kids’ marshmallows as well. Most of us are not great at waiting for things. We get cranky when we have to wait in line at the supermarket or at a traffic light, which means we’re cranky a lot. **Waiting is stressful.** It was a dark time in Israel. There had been no new revelation from God through his prophets in over 400 years. Not exactly the context for optimism. But although Simeon’s body was failing, his spirit grew stronger, because the hope that was in him was greater than the hopelessness around him.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, Simeon watched and waited. He must have known the prophecies—known what to look for. He would go to the temple whenever couples brought their sons to

be dedicated, and he would watch and pray: “Is it this one, Lord? Is it that one?” He was waiting for Jesus every day, for years.

The other key people in this story were Mary and Joseph. It was time for them to go to the temple in Jerusalem, where Mary would participate in a purification rite that all women went through after childbirth, and Jesus would be consecrated to God, as were all firstborn Jewish sons. As they entered the temple to fulfil their vows, a stranger approached them, the old man Simeon. He reached out his arms for the baby.

Have you ever been there as a parent? You are out with your new, incredibly cute baby and complete strangers stop you to “ooh and ah” over him or her. Mary and Joseph may have wondered whether or not to hand over their precious baby boy to an old man they had never seen before. But something must have eased their minds because they handed over baby Jesus to Simeon.

Simeon held him and thanked God for allowing him to see the child that would reveal God’s true nature to his people. Simeon’s attitude was, “I’m ready to die. You can take me home now. It’s been worth the wait.”

Simeon made some prophetic statements, both good news and bad, in verses 34–35.

These were strange words from a strange old man. But the Bible says that Joseph and Mary “marvelled at what was said.”

We all have things we want so badly we can hardly stand it—things like healthy relationships, the end of pain and suffering, a restoration of normal—whatever that is for you. The waiting seems like torture. And the question we all ask is, *Is it worth the wait?*

We fail to comprehend how much faithfulness, hope, perseverance, and responsiveness to the Holy Spirit count with God. You may not have a lot of knowledge about theology or the Bible; you may not always let other drivers merge; you may not always recycle your trash or get thank-you notes written on time; you may not always have the right thing to say when someone you love is hurting. But if you have hope that God is at work, in spite of the circumstances, God will reward you, and it will be worth the wait. The question is, then, what will you do while you’re waiting?

On November 18, 1995, Israeli violinist Itzhak Perlman came out on stage at New York’s Lincoln Centre. If you’ve ever seen Perlman in action, you know that just getting on stage is

no small matter for him. Stricken with polio as a child, Perlman wears braces on both legs and walks with two crutches. To see him come across the stage is a sight you don’t forget. He moves painfully, but with dignity, until he gets to his chair. He sits down slowly, lays his crutches aside, undoes the clasps on his braces, tucks one foot back and stretches the other forward. Then he reaches down, picks up his violin, notches it under his chin, nods to the maestro, and begins to play.

On this particular occasion, however, something went wrong. Just as he finished the first stanza, a string on Perlman’s violin broke. You could hear it snap, going off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what that sound meant or what Perlman had to do. People who were there that night later said: “We figured that he would have to redo his braces put on the clasps again, pick up the crutches, and limp his way off stage ... or else wait for someone to bring him another [string or violin].”

But Perlman didn’t do any of that. Instead, he paused for a moment, closed his eyes, and then signalled to the conductor to begin again. The orchestra recommenced, and he joined them where he’d left off. He played with a passion, power, and purity like the audience had never heard before. Of course, all of them knew that it was impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings. But that night, that player refused to know that. “You could see him modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head,” someone said. “At one point, it sounded like he was re-tuning the strings to get new sounds from them they had never made before.”

The author who recounts this tale closes it like this: “When [Perlman] finished, there was an awesome silence in the room.” And then, suddenly, the audience exploded to their feet.

“We were all ... screaming and cheering, doing everything we could to show how much we appreciated what he had done.” Perlman “smiled, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow to quiet us, and then said, not boastfully, but in a quiet, pensive, reverent tone: ‘You know, sometimes it is the artist’s task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.’”

Affirmation: *Let us affirm our faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.*

Though he was divine, he did not cling to equality with God, but made himself nothing. Taking the form of a slave, he was born in human likeness. He humbled himself and was obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God has raised him on high, and has given him the name above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every voice proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, fountain of all wisdom, we pray for all Christian people; for Bishops Stephen, Andrew and Karen, for all Christian leaders, and for those who teach and keep the faith. May the word of Christ dwell richly in our hearts, and knit us together in the bond of your love. Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the leaders of the nations, thinking especially this week of Rushi Sunak, and all those in authority under them. Give them the gift of your wisdom, and a right discernment in all things. Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.** We pray for all who live in the Bride Valley and those who visit us. Speak your word of peace in our midst. Help us to serve one another as Christ has served us. Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who do not believe and yet who long to know you, the very word of life. Open their ears to hear your voice, and open their hearts to the knowledge of your love in Christ. Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for those bowed down with grief, fear or sickness, may your living word bring comfort and healing to all those in need. Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We give thanks for all those who have died in the faith of Christ, and we rejoice with all your saints, trusting in the promise of your word fulfilled. Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit, you have made us one with your saints in heaven and on earth: grant that in our earthly pilgrimage we may ever be supported by this fellowship of love and prayer and know ourselves to be surrounded by their witness to your power and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today your daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn: Like a candle flame

1 Like a candle flame,
flick'ring small in our darkness.
Uncreated light shines through infant eyes.

*God is with us, alleluia,
God is with us, alleluia,
come to save us, alleluia,
come to save us, alleluia!*

2 Stars and angels sing,
yet the earth sleeps in shadows;
can this tiny spark
set a world on fire?

Chorus

3 Yet His light shall shine
from our lives, Spirit blazing,
as we touch the flame
of His holy fire.

Chorus

Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

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Let us bless the Lord: **Thanks be to God.**

Blessing, honour and glory be yours, here and everywhere, now and forever. Amen.

Be at peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ Amen.