

## **CHURCH@HOME: Candlemass: The Presentation of Christ in the Temple – 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

Readings: Hebrews 2:14-end  
Luke 2:22-40

### *Reflection from Anne Edwards*

Today we remember the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, also known as Candlemass, and are told the story of Mary and Joseph's visit to the Temple with the baby Jesus to fulfil the traditions of their faith, the requirements of the Law. This is just a family doing the usual things after a child is born. There may have been others there with their new babies – we're not told about other families, but we are told of two elderly people: Simeon and Anna. Luke gives us only hints about them, but they are enough to suggest a long period of faithful waiting and being guided in prayer and patience to the point where they can recognise the glory of God in the child they see.

Jewish law required parents to consecrate their first-born male child to the Lord. If you were well-off, a lamb would be included in the 'purification sacrifices'. We're told they could only afford a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons indicating that Mary and Joseph were poor. Scholars believe that the wise men had not yet arrived in Jerusalem talking of a star and a new King. So their visit to the Temple was full of hope and promise as they encountered these two elderly people who, to their amazement, immediately saw greatness in their tiny infant.

Simeon and Anna were both devout Jews who had spent their lives longing for the "consolation of Israel" (v.25). The Greek word translated "consolation" is also the word that describes the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, and Isaiah ch. 40, v.1 and 2 read "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins ...."

In this baby, Simeon sees the fulfilment of all the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people across the centuries. To call Jesus "the consolation of Israel" takes us back to the time of Abraham when the Lord said, "I will make your name great .... And through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3) After that came the reaffirmation to Isaac and then to Jacob. God told Moses that one day a great prophet, unlike any before him, would come. Later God promised David a son who would reign on his throne forever. Later again, God spoke through Isaiah and promised that a son would be born of a virgin, and that his name would be called Immanuel: God with us. And later again Micah predicted that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

For generations the promises were repeated – from father to son, from mother to daughter, from family to family, from the older to the younger, and Jewish children were taught to pray for the Messiah's appearance.

By the time Jesus is born, there have been all these centuries of expectation built up. Whilst many people were no longer expecting anything other than perhaps someone who would overthrow the Romans and release Israel from the grip of Roman domination, there were others who were aware something was up – Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah, the shepherds, and now in this scene Simeon and Anna, who believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God's promise should come. All their lives they waited quietly and patiently upon God. Simeon was waiting for the day when God would comfort his people. We're told God had promised Simeon through his Holy Spirit that life would not end for him before he had seen God's own Anointed King, and in the baby Jesus he recognised that King and was glad, now ready to "depart in peace". However, he also recognised the pain Mary was going to have to bear, and spoke out this warning to her. His words have become the Nunc Dimittis, now a great and precious hymn of the Church.

Anna – well in these few verses Luke gives us a complete character sketch. We're even told who she was, who her father and tribe were. She was a widow – she had known sorrow and not become bitter. She was 84 years old and had never ceased to hope. She never ceased to worship, she never ceased to pray – spending her time in God's house with God's people in prayer, and thus is also granted the gift of recognising who this baby is, giving thanks, and she kept speaking about Him to others waiting expectantly for the deliverance of Jerusalem.

Luke gives us an amazing picture of patient faithfulness. We don't see much of that around us today. Order online, it can be with you in a matter of hours. Jesus warns us that the Day of the Lord will come like "a thief in the night" and indicates that even now, like the virgins awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom, we too must be ready waiting, prepared for Jesus' return. Is that something for which we are patiently waiting – in worship, in prayer alone and with other Christians?

Our passage from Hebrews tells us that when he came to earth born as a man, Jesus did not lay aside his divine nature, but he did lay aside his divine glory. And he became fully human, identifying with our weaknesses, subject to temptation and suffering.

Why did he do this? So we might be released from the power of the devil and the fear of death (v.14).

You might say: "But I know all this. I know that Jesus is God's Son, born as a baby in the humblest surroundings and celebrated at Christmas."

I wonder if sometimes we are over-familiar with a truth some of us have known for decades and it would be good to ask God to remind us who we are ... God's precious children adopted into His family through our baptism, and who Jesus is and the implications of our faith. This Sunday five of our young people will be taking their First Communion, and they have spent time recently learning what it means as they take the next step on from their baptisms.

Jesus chose to be stripped of his glory to share in our frailty – an utterly amazing truth – at which we should be full of wonder. Hebrews chapter 2. verse 17 reads: "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." And verse 18 continues "Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested."

Let us come to Him now in worship and prayer, looking to Jesus to shine his light into our darkness, and to comfort us and remind us just how much we are loved by God, and in return live out lives worthy of our calling.