

Friday 2 February 2024

Candlemas



Presentation of Christ in the Temple
Giovanni Baleison. (1492), La Briquie, France.

Today day marks the completion of forty days after Jesus' birth, and remembers the occasion when Mary and Joseph took their young baby to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Law of Leviticus said that Mary had to be 'cleansed'—the completion of her purification following the birth of a male child.

At the heart of the story are the old man Simeon, who praises God and acclaims the infant as 'the light to enlighten the nations', and the prophet Anna, who gave thanks and proclaimed him her redeemer.

The image of Christ as The Light has led to the celebration of light countering darkness, with candles often taking a central place in the observance.

Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

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The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Longing for light](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

Dear friends, forty days ago we celebrated the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now we recall the day on which he was presented in the Temple, when he was offered to the Father and shown to his people.

As a sign of his coming among us, his mother was purified, as we now come to him for cleansing. In their old age Simeon and Anna recognised him as their Lord, as we today sing of his glory. In this Eucharist, we celebrate both the joy of his coming and his searching judgement, looking back to the day of his birth and forward to the coming days of his passion.

Prayers of Penitence occur later in the service.

The Collect for Candlemas

Almighty and ever-living God,
clothed in majesty,
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple,
in substance of our flesh:
grant that we may be presented to you
with pure and clean hearts,
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

The Gloria

All **Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

First reading

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Malachi

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts. *Malachi 3:1-5*

This is the Word of the Lord

All **Thanks be to God.**

Second reading

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, Jesus 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.

Hebrews 2:14-18

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 The Lord is my light (Taize) [\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

All Glory to you O Lord.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus 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.'

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. *Luke 2:22-40*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Imagine the scene: a Godly man who is rich in years enters the Temple in Jerusalem he sees a very-young baby, stands rapt in wonder, and utters a hymn of prophecy while under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We still repeat its ancient words, often daily. We sing what is often call 'Nunc Dimittis':

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.

This song should act as something like 'spiritual dynamite' as we consider its astonishing words.

Its most amazing prophecy says that the baby Jesus will be 'a light'. Taken in the context of Jewish prophecy, it is no mere verbal phrase or metaphor but is saying that the baby is God. To a Jewish audience, all references to light mean God or a person or thing so profoundly God-soaked (like scripture) that they imply God. For example, the first of all God's creations was light (think of Genesis 1); Moses in the desert was attracted to a light that looked like a fire; he led the chosen people to safety by following a pillar of fire; millennia later, Jesus was transfigured Mount

Tabor and shone with an intense light. So old Simeon is not describing Jesus as being 'like' a light of, say, a source of inspiration, but being of God. Jesus *is* God.

His next major shock is to say Jesus is a light *to the Gentiles*. The Gentiles are not Jews, so those without the genetic and religious heritage that could make them members of the 'chosen people.' In the holiness code of the Jews, the means to purity was to avoid anything that could pollute or diminish. They avoided all that was not clean—in the jargon, was not 'Kosher'. They were not even allowed to talk to someone who was not Jewish. Into that mindset, Simeon prophesies that Jesus will be God to those who are not Jewish, to those who are not the chosen people. To emphasis the point, the *nunc dimittis* also talks of 'all' peoples. This second part will have been beyond comprehension to those hearing Simeon, though the idea was there beforehand—if they understood their Scriptures. Jesus is God *for everyone*.

Finally, after uttering this hymn of praise, Simeon gives a strong proviso, a 'spiritual health warning': he said that Jesus will 'be a sign that will be opposed'. This final and usually neglected footnote to the *nunc dimittis* suggests that (even then) it was clear that Jesus's overwhelming claims would be too much for some people. Maybe it's a bit much for us too. Some of us will struggle to cope with the awe-inspiring claims of God's sacrificial love. It's often easier to ignore or oppose God than to comply and love Him back in ways that satisfy the New Commandment, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' But there is no other way than to obey. God wants all of us, and that means our love, our loyalty, our lives. Jesus wants all of us.

Today in the Church calendar is Candlemas when we remember old Simeon and elderly Anna, and recall their blessing of the baby Jesus. We will not hear anything more of Jesus now until his bar-Mitzvah at the age of twelve, as described in the next few verses of Luke's Gospel. For now, let's satisfy ourselves with the last sentence of today's portion of that same Gospel, 'The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.' God is also asking us to grow in faith, to become strong in love and wisdom, and to allow His favour to rest upon us. To that end, let us hear a response to the *nunc dimittis*, a modern sonnet from the priest-poet Malcolm Guite:

They came, as called, according to the Law.
Though they were poor and had to keep things simple,
They moved in grace, in quietness, in awe,
For God was coming with them to His Temple.

Amidst the outer court's commercial bustle
They'd waited hours, enduring shouts and shoves,

Buyers and sellers, sensing one more hustle,
Had made a killing on the two young doves.

They come at last with us to Candlemas
And keep the day the prophecies came true
We glimpse with them, amidst our busyness,
The peace that Simeon and Anna knew.

For Candlemas still keeps His kindled light,
Against the dark our Saviour's face is bright.

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<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/tag/candlemas-day/>

Music **The nunc dimittis**, sung by Aled Jones

(optional)

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray to the Father through Christ who is our light and life.

Father, your Christ is acclaimed as the glory of Israel:

look in mercy on your Church, sharing his light.

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Father, your Christ in his temple brings judgement on the world:

look in mercy on the nations, who long for his justice.

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Father, your Christ, who was rich, for our sakes became poor:

look in mercy on the needy, suffering with him.

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Father, your Christ is the one in whom faithful servants find their peace:

look in mercy on the departed, that they may see your salvation.

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Father, your Christ is revealed as the one destined to be rejected:

look in mercy on us who now turn towards his passion.

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Lord God, you kept faith with Simeon and Anna,
and showed them the infant King.

Give us grace to put all our trust in your promises,
and the patience to wait for their fulfilment;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Christ, have mercy.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The penitence

Hear the words of our Saviour Jesus Christ:

'I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me shall never walk in darkness
but shall have the light of life.'

Let us therefore bring our sins into his light
and confess them in penitence and faith. *cf. John 8:12*

All 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.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The peace

In the tender mercy of our God,
the dayspring from on high has broken upon us,
to give light to those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.
The peace of the Lord be always with you,
All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [Jesus bids us shine](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)
[Angel voices ever singing](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below, if the service is Eucharistic.

The Dismissal

Christ the Son of God, born of Mary,
fill you with his grace to trust his promises
and obey his will;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.
All Amen.

HYMN 4 [Shine, Jesus, shine](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Candlemas Procession Candles are lit

Lord God, the springing source of everlasting light,
pour into the hearts of your faithful people
the brilliance of your eternal splendour,
that we, who by these kindling flames
light up this temple to your glory,
may have the darkness of our souls dispelled,
and so be counted worthy to stand before you
in that eternal city where you live and reign,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

Nunc dimittis

All process to the font and sing or say the Nunc dimittis as they process.

**All A light to lighten the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.**

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: ♦
your word has been fulfilled.

**All A light to lighten the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.**

My own eyes have seen the salvation ♦
which you have prepared in the sight of every people.

**All A light to lighten the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.**

A light to reveal you to the nations ♦
and the glory of your people Israel.

**All A light to lighten the nations
and the glory of your people Israel. *Luke 2:29-32***

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever.
Amen.**

**All A light to lighten the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.**

Final Responsory

This responsory can occur around the font. All stand with lit candles. In some liturgies, candles for the year are blessed at this place in the service.

Father, here we bring to an end our celebration of the Saviour's birth.

**All Help us, in whom he has been born,
to live his life that has no end.**

Here we have offered the Church's sacrifice of praise.

**All Help us, who have received the bread of life,
to be thankful for your gift.**

Here we have rejoiced with faithful Simeon and Anna.

**All Help us, who have found the Lord in his temple,
to trust in your eternal promises.**

Here we have greeted the light of the world.

**All Help us, who bear these candles,
never to forsake the light of Christ.**

Here we stand near the place of baptism.

**All Help us, who are marked with the cross,
to share the Lord's death and resurrection.**

Here we turn from Christ's birth to his passion.

**All Help us, for whom Lent is near,
to enter deeply into the Easter mystery.**

Here we bless one another in your name.

**All Help us, who now go in peace,
to shine with your light in the world.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.**

All depart in peace.

If the service includes the blessing of candles

Father, here we bring to an end our celebration of the Saviour's birth.

**All Help us, in whom he has been born,
to live his life that has no end.**

Here we have offered the Church's sacrifice of praise.

**All Help us, who have received the bread of life,
to be thankful for your gift.**

Here we have rejoiced with faithful Simeon and Anna.

**All Help us, who have found the Lord in his temple,
to trust in your eternal promises.**

Here we have greeted the Light of the world.

**All Help us, who now extinguish these candles,
never to forsake the light of Christ.**

All now extinguish their candles.

Here we now stand near the place of baptism.

**All Help us, who are marked with the cross,
to share the Lord's death and resurrection.**

Here we turn from Christ's birth to his passion.

**All Help us, for whom Lent is near,
to enter deeply into the Easter mystery.**

Here we bless one another in your name.

**All Help us, who now go in peace,
to shine with your light in the world.
Thanks be to God!
Amen.**

All depart in peace.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good,
always and everywhere to give you thanks and praise
through Jesus Christ, who is one with you from all eternity.
For on this day he appeared in the Temple
in substance of our flesh to come near to us in judgement.
He searches the hearts of all your people
and brings to light the image of your splendour.
Your servant Simeon acclaimed him as the light to lighten the nations
while Anna spoke of him to all who looked for your redemption.
Destined for the falling and rising of many,
he was lifted high upon the cross
and a sword of sorrow pierced his mother's heart
when by his sacrifice he made our peace with you.
And now we rejoice and glorify your name
that we, too, have seen your salvation
and join with angels and archangels
in their unending hymn of praise:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our 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 for ever.
Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break the bread of life and that life is the light of the world.

**All God here among us,
light in the midst of us,
bring us to light and life.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna,
who lived to welcome the Messiah:
may we, who have received these gifts beyond words,
prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes
to bring us to eternal life;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.