

SERMON FOR ZOOM – CANDLEMAS – 30 January 2022 - Luke 2.22-40

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



I have always had a soft spot for Candlemas. Back in 1992 we bought Harry to the chapel of Lincoln Theological College for his dedication on this Feast Day. Here we are, is it really 30 years later – now he’s a husband, Northern Region Manager for Foodcycle, and he’s just survived a week with his parents.



Me and Marley – 19 September 2021

I love the Christening part of my ministry. It is a huge privilege, month in month out to be the person who is handed a child to “present them to the Lord”. Even with all the disruption of last year, we managed 26 baptisms – and they keep coming. I’ve been here long enough that I now get to meet big brothers and sisters who are now at school. Let’s hope that this coming Christmas, it will be possible to look round the three Crib Services, recall how many of the children I have baptised, knowing that our children’s work is appreciated. It is lovely chatting to mums and dads, listening to their stories, playing with the youngsters, getting to know them. I like to think I am still young enough to remember that it is not easy being a new mum or dad – and then realise that I am old enough to be a granddad (and that the couples I’m chatting to probably think I am!).

I also like Candlemas because it brings light at the end of January/beginning of February. January is not my favourite month, I usually moan that churches are cold (and then I realise how blessed I am that both my churches have decent heating systems), but it does seem that this month will never end. The Church of England pays me on the last day of the month – so tomorrow is pay day! Hallelujah, about time too!



I love the way the liturgy today captures the light of Christmas – starting by the font and spreading around the church. I love the way the light shines round, through, the gospel – and our response to God’s Gospel, God’s good news, as we sing the Gloria together. “Glory to God in the highest”, this is what we proclaim.

In every service we do, our liturgy, our pattern of worship, should have a form and a pattern – it is there to do a job, to bring us closer to God, to bring us into His presence. At a Eucharist it builds us up to the sharing of the body and blood of Christ, to kneeling before his altar and receiving the bread of life. On Zoom, even though we’re not building up to the Eucharist – we still want a pattern that works. That brings us through word and music, into our prayers – ending with the prayer that Jesus taught us – that intimate prayer, that prayer which is so personal, and yet so corporate. “Our Father in heaven” – we pray together as God’s people. A friend of mine goes to a large Anglican church in Cheshire, and they have recently had an influx of refugees from Hong Kong, people whose first language is Cantonese. The first group found a welcome in that church, now others have come and joined them. They’re the sort of church that puts everything on a big screen, so now much of what they are projecting in in two languages – English and Cantonese. It’s also given a new dimension to worship, as the Lord’s Prayer is prayed out loud in two languages.



Today our service continues as we relight our candles while singing my favourite hymn “How shall I sing that majesty”. It’s by John Mason Neale, a nineteenth century clergyman. Apparently he was one of the best classicists of his time, but failed to get his honours degree from Trinity College Cambridge, because in those days you needed to pass a maths paper, and he didn’t.



Coe Fen by Bob Jones, © [Bob Jones \(cc-by-sa/2.0\)](#)

The tune is “Coe Fen”, and was written by Kenneth Naylor, who was Music Master at the Leys School in Cambridge until his death in 1991. Coe Fen is the area next to the school, and we often went for walks there on a Saturday with my grandad. When I sing it, I remember grandad, being a child in Cambridge – and grandad loved his music, so I remember singing together.

The hymn is a very personal statement: “How shall I sing”, there’s a challenge for each and every one of us. In church the light comes to the focus of the font, our place of baptism, a symbol of our commitment to God. So think of your commitment, ask God’s strength to continue to journey with him.



Then we blow our candles out, because we have to face Lent. We have to walk with Christ through the desert, through his passion, we must face death before we know resurrection.

Candlemas gives me the light and strength I need when I am coping with so much death – you can tell it is January, the undertakers have me on speed dial. Three funerals this week, then three next week – and some of them are church friends, people whose death touches us all.



“Help us, who now go in peace” says our final response – for today, we bless one another in God’s name. We are in this together, says our liturgy, we are God’s people. “Shine as a light in the world”.

Our churches need to grow, and our churches will only grow if we are happy and excited and joyful – at peace and a pleasure to be with – if people look at us and see the love of God in us.

You can imagine Simeon and Anna, two elderly people, who took the Christ child in their arms, and responded just as we do when we are handed a new baby, a new grandchild – or, here we have young Gwen, a new Godchild for my wife. I will never forget holding my four just after birth and that overwhelming sense of love and joy and peace – and fear, and excitement, and everything else.

I could have spent this sermon unpacking Scripture, looking back at the Old Testament prophecies, what did Simeon mean when he talked about salvation revelation, glory – the falling and rising of many in Israel. What did Anna mean when she spoke of redemption of Jerusalem?



But today, it's about you, it's about us. Hold your candle, come before your God, sing his praise, let music and worship and liturgy bring you closer to Him – be the light that God calls you to be. And, individually and together, be that light in the world.

Peter Barham
23 January 2022