

The United Benefice of St Michael
Lichfield and St John, Wall

Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)
31st January

Canticle: A Song of the Covenant

- 1 Thus says God, who created the heavens,
who fashioned the earth and all that dwells in it;**
- 2 Who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it,**
- 3 'I am the Lord and I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;**
- 4 'I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind,**
- 5 'To bring out the captives from the dungeon,
from the prison, those who sit in darkness.**
- 6 'I am the Lord, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other.'**
Isaiah 42.5-8a

**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.**

Collect

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.
Amen.

New Testament Reading

Hebrews 2.14 - end

¹⁴Since 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, ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore 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. ¹⁸Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Psalm 24.7-10

**7 Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.**

8 Who is the King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.

**9 Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.**

10 Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory.

**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.**

Gospel Reading.

Luke 2.22-40

²²When 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. ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

²⁵Now 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. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided 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, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all
peoples,
³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.
³⁴Then 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 ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'
³⁶There 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,
³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At 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.
³⁹When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Sermon

The Gift of Hope

The novelist Vikram Seth on Desert Island Discs chose as one of his top discs a poignant recording made during the war by a BBC sound engineer. The engineer was capturing the song of nightingales in a Surrey garden but, whilst recording, a hundred and ninety seven Lancaster bombers passed overhead en route to a bombing raid in Germany. In the recording you can hear the joyful song of the nightingale and then, underneath and growing in intensity and threatening to overwhelm the birdsong, the ominous drone of the bombers. Seth spoke of the "heartbreaking counterpoint of joy and pain".

(www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/magazine-35874257)

In the gospel story of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple we have just such a heart-breaking counterpoint of joy and sorrow. Here we see so much that is good and beautiful.

There is a new life represented in this child only days old. Here is extraordinary hope and anticipation.

We have the pride of grateful parents, their joy in this child who has been brought to birth, unique, theirs, and yet a gift from God.

Here is great faith and devotion too. Simeon and Anna are watching and waiting for God to bring consolation and redemption to Israel. How easy it would be for them to become disillusioned or distracted in their waiting. But they stick with it because they believe that God is good and loves Israel and will act for them.

And there is a blessing given to the baby Jesus by the elderly Simeon; the insight that this little child will bring light not only to waiting Israel but to all the nations of the earth. The Spirit of God is at work in Anna and Simeon and hovers over this child and his parents. In God's temple, God's Spirit bears witness to God's son.

Life is glorious and to be celebrated. Nightingales sing! There is love, joy, faithfulness, gratitude, new discoveries and the knowledge that we are in the presence of a loving God.

But this story of Jesus presented in the temple is a bittersweet story; there is a darker note to be heard, a counterpoint. Because when we look at all these characters, we sense their vulnerability, their frailty. What, after all, is more helpless and fragile than a baby?

And what of his parents? What is poor old Joseph to make of this strange birth? And Mary? Does the taint of disgrace still hang around her and her newborn child? The circumstances of Jesus' birth were, after all, let's say, unusual. It's all a bit messy and unsatisfactory, not quite the perfect family as seen on TV advertising, more like our families, more like our experience of that life is actually like.

And Simeon and Anna carry their own vulnerabilities too. Anna's husband died seven years into their marriage. For the greater part of her life she has been widowed and, as a widow in those times, lives a precarious existence dependent on the charity of her male relatives.

And Simeon, waiting and waiting and waiting, must have had his moments of doubt and disappointment. Sometimes he must've hoped against hope and trusted through gritted teeth that God would console Israel.

Because Simeon and Anna carry not only their own struggles, doubts and the infirmities of old age but also the sadness of their people. Simeon, we are told, is waiting for the consolation of Israel. If Israel needs consoling then Israel is living in a time of mourning and sadness. It was hard for pious and faithful people to see their nation, God's chosen people, under the oppression of the Gentile nations.

Anna, we are told, is looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. If Jerusalem needs redeeming it is because Jerusalem is not free. Anna and Simeon are full of hope and expectation for Israel but they also mourn its captivity.

So into such a world - in all its glory and all its fragility - comes Jesus, the Lord's Christ, the glory of his people Israel and the light that will lighten the Gentiles. And how does he come? Does he come as the divine fixer who will bypass all that complicated and messy human emotion and experience? What is revealed is that, rather than sidestepping the muddle of human life, in Jesus, God chooses to dive straight down into it. So here is a great mystery: the God who made the world now enters into that world and submits to all its glory and fragility.

Simeon blesses Jesus but...

This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

This is not what a mother wants to hear about her baby. She doesn't want to hear that he will be spoken against. She doesn't want talk of swords that pierce the heart. But in order to redeem our suffering, God enters into our suffering. There is great light in this Candlemas story but there is shadow too and by far the greatest shadow is cast by the shape of a cross. We can hear, so to speak, the nightingale song and the drone of Lancaster bombers. And this light and the shade cannot -in this world, at least - be separated out, as much as we might wish it to be so.

I don't need to labour the point. In the past year we have seen something of the glory of human life in the selfless work of frontline workers of all kinds, the brilliance of scientists in creating a vaccine and in countless moments of human kindness and neighbourliness. But we have also heard the threatening rumble of suffering and death. We have seen - in hospital wards, lost jobs, lost school days, mental health problems and widening divisions between rich and poor - the heartbreaking fragility of human life. We have all been touched by this crisis but for some of us this will have come painfully close to our homes and families.

In a world of sorrow and oppression, there is much we can do as Christians – there are actions we can take. Run foodbanks, setup telephone helplines, lead online worship, get

the shopping for a shielding neighbour and so on. All really good things to do but, like Simeon and Anna, we must also carry in our hearts the fragility of the world, waiting and praying for its consolation and redemption. This is the world into which Jesus was born and, in fellowship with him and with all who suffer and mourn, we pray, longing and waiting for the greater dawning of his Kingdom in a world of shadow and suffering. And as we faithfully bear witness in this way to the sorrow of the world, we also bear faithful witness to the one who has come amongst us, whose presence is a "light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel". In this fragile little child, Anna and Simeon see salvation – one greater even than a much needed vaccination! They see not only the piercing sword, the falling and rising, the rumble of the engines of war overhead, the stealthy spread of a deadly disease, they see salvation, God's choice is not only to share with us in the mess but also to redeem it.

As we hold together the counterpoint of joy and pain, may God give us the faith to live as those who look for consolation and redemption in these dark times. May God give us grace to stand and wait in fellowship with Jesus and all those who endure the pain of the world. And then may God give us the gift of hope in the One who is coming into the world, the light who will lighten the nations.

Rt Revd Matthew Parker

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST MICHAEL

Those newly in need of prayer

Alison Knight

Those in continuing special need of prayer:

Sam Bassett, Mark Berry, Elizabeth Chapman, Chris Clayton,
Dorothy Clayton, Jo Cobb, Dottie Collins, Alison Cox-Toplis, Martin Dewes, Chris
Dickerson, Colin Eastwood, David Edge, Robert Harris, Robert McAllester-Jones,
Marielouise Oliver, Arthur Palin, Nick Rutter, Anthony Staples aged 7, John Tipper,
Sheila Vaughan, Judith Watson, Renee Wellings, Peter and Anne Whatson, Felicity
Woodfield, Jamie, Gary and Denise, Julian & Wendy,

Those who have died

John Stuart

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST JOHN

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Post Communion Prayer

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.
Amen

CHURCH NOTICES

BIBLE STUDY IN LENT

We will be starting a new series of Bible Studies on the Wednesdays of Lent starting on **Wednesday 24 February until Wednesday 31st March.**

Each session will be on Zoom at 10.30am.

This year the gospel that we are mainly reading at our Sunday services is the Gospel of Mark. Our Lent Bible Study will focus on **The Passion of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.**

Jesus's death and resurrection lies at the very heart of our Christian faith and has done so from the very beginning. These sessions will give us an opportunity to focus on the passion story and its meaning for us in a way that we are not often able to do.

The zoom link will be sent out each week with the links for our services. There will also be a sheet with the Bible text and questions to think about available to download from our website.

Everyone is invited to join these sessions.

SUNDAY SERVICE 31ST JANUARY: CANDLEMAS

On Sunday 31st January we will celebrate Candlemas or the Feast of the Presentation in our 10.00am zoom service. As part of that service we would like everyone who attends to be able to light a candle. Please make sure that you have a candle available to light during the service. Something like a night light is probably best to ensure that you smoke alarm is not set off!

RECTOR'S RETIREMENT

I have written to Bishop Michael to tell him that I intend to retire at the end of April. My last Sunday will be the Sunday after Easter. I very much hope that we will be back in church by Easter Sunday and so will be able to say farewell in person. Diana and I have enjoyed being part of the church at St Michael's and St John's but it is now time to open a new chapter in our lives. We are moving to South Somerset.

Simon Baker, Rector

MU Members.

Our MU subs are due, this year they are £ 26. Could you pay by cheque please, made payable to St. Michael's MU. Thank you Lynn

COUNSELLING One result of this 3rd lockdown starting will be increased pressures on all of us, and many people are feeling anxious and depressed and are coping with a lot of extra stress and loss.

Phoenix Counselling Service is a small charity which for 5 years, has been providing counselling to adults living in Burntwood, Lichfield and the surrounding areas, who are not able to access counselling via the NHS and who cannot afford private counselling. Professionally trained counsellors provide a safe, confidential space to talk about your thoughts and feelings, and work through problems that you might be facing in your life. At present all the counselling is online or by telephone although we will offer face to face sessions when restrictions permit.

Contact details: www.phoenixcounselling-service.co.uk

email: phoenixcounselling2@gmail.com

Mobile: 07415517663

Best wishes, Rhoda Wharton

CHURCHES TOGETHER www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html

THE FOODBANK is always happy to receive gifts of

- Tinned meat and fish
- Tinned fruit and vegetables, soup and beans
- Rice pudding and custard
- Instant coffee, tea, sugar, long life milk and fruit juice
- Packets of cereals, biscuits and snacks
- Pasta, rice and pasta sauce
- Jam

Items should be **at least 3 months in date** or the Foodbank is not allowed to issue them. *Maggie and David_01543 255308*

PARISH DIARY

Sunday 31st January: Candlemas

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| 8:00am | Holy Communion | Zoom |
| 10:00am | Sunday Service | Zoom |

Monday 1st February

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| All day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |

Tuesday 2nd February

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| All Day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |

Wednesday 3rd February

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| All Day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |

Thursday 4th February

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| All day | OFFICE OPEN | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |
| 9:00am | Magazine Distribution | St Michael's |

Friday 5th February

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| All Day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |

Saturday 6th February

Sunday 7th February: Lent -2

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| 8:00am | Holy Communion | Zoom |
| 10:00am | Sunday Service | Zoom |