

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 2nd February 2020
Candlemas

A light to enlighten the gentiles

In those early days of parenthood what must Mary and Joseph have been feeling? It must have been frightening. Parenthood at the best of times is quite daunting. Add to that the visions of angels telling you the child in your arms was from God; the weird words of a bunch of smelly, dirty shepherds who had turned up at the stable you were forced to stop in, claiming they had heard from angels of this special child born to the people of Israel, given by God as Saviour to God's people.

It must have been a bit of a relief to go to the Temple, somewhere familiar, to present their new born to God as their first male child in the fulfilment of the law. I wonder, even at this point, if they understood what was happening to them. There is something, by this point, which might leave questions in their minds, after all, the evidence they have that Jesus is special seems to be coming from ethereal beings; it could all still be a dream, an illusion. And then they meet Simeon and Anna.

Simeon and Anna are presented as wise and established people. They have served God for many years in the temple, both awaiting the salvation of Israel; Anna as what we might call a hermit or an anchoress and Simeon as a devout worshipper. We don't even know if either Anna or Simeon were official temple representatives. Their description seems to make them ordinary people living out their lives in faith.

This day they are drawn into the Temple by the Holy Spirit. Simeon had been assured by God he would not die until he had seen the consolation of Israel. Anna, her life spent in prayer, in the power of the Holy Spirit is drawn to proclaim to all who would listen that this child was sent by God. It is in their words that Mary & Joseph, and we as listeners to this story, are given yet more insight into the person of Jesus and a deeper understanding of the implications of Jesus upon the world. No longer is the witness to this child purely from angels and possibly deluded shepherds. Now the witness is from respected, earthly observers, telling us that in this child Jesus is found a sign of hope for all Jerusalem, through Jerusalem to the whole of creation; 'a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' (Lk 2.32 NIV). Simeon's words take us further into an understanding of Jesus places in the salvation of God's people, that's God's salvation is brought through Jesus for everyone.

This story, 40 days after the celebrations of the birth of this child, brings us to the end of the Christmas story of the Holy Incarnation. Throughout this time we have reflected on the nature of the infant Jesus and what his incarnation means for us. The God/child who has come into the world bringing light and hope to the brokenness of humanity, to the brokenness of our own lives, if we are ready to receive him as our Lord.

Today as part of our worship we have an opportunity to receive Jesus afresh into our lives. After receiving the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist we will go to the font, singing the words of Simeon. We go to the font to remind us of our baptismal promises, reaffirmed in our confirmation. Here we have the opportunity to commit ourselves to Jesus anew and to prepare ourselves for the coming season of Lent, a time set aside for reflection, preparation and spiritual growth, preparing ourselves to receive the risen Christ in the Easter celebrations.

Will you open your hearts to him and receive the light that is the hope of the world; the light that came to enlighten the Gentiles, guiding us along the way of peace and truth?

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