

30th January 2022 – Morning Service

Candlemas

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship

[If you have a candle, you might like to light it before reading this service]

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." Welcome to this service for Candlemas. This is a feast that the Church celebrates on 2nd February or sometimes on the Sunday prior to that, marking the end of the season of Epiphany on that date.

StF 24 – Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to worship.	One day every tongue will confess You are God.
Come, now is the time to give your heart.	One day every knee will bow.
Come, just as you are to worship.	Still the greatest treasure remains
Come, just as you are before your God,	For those who gladly choose You now.
Come.	

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Prayers

All glory and honour are due to you, Lord God, King of the Universe, Faithful God, who has made all that is, seen and unseen. Blessed are you, Lord, who sustain all things by your mighty power. You spoke light into being and made day and night. You formed the land and the sea. You have planted the seed of life in this world, and have planted eternal life within us. You have walked on earth with us in your Son, and through him have secured for us eternal life, which is your gift freely given to all who will receive it. Through your Spirit you dwell within your people. We gladly respond in worshipping and honouring you. **Amen.**

Lord our God, you sent your Son to be the light of the world, yet so often we choose to dwell in darkness. When we neglect your Word because it challenges us, **Lord, have mercy.**

When we try to keep parts of our lives hidden because they make us uncomfortable, **Lord, have mercy.**

When we neglect the means of grace, **Lord, have mercy.**

When we fail to recognise your image in others, **Lord, have mercy.**

Through the work of Christ you have purchased eternal forgiveness for us, and we gladly receive it. **Amen.** Hear then the words of grace: our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

Reading: Isaiah 60:1-5, 19-20

'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.'

'Lift up your eyes and look about you: all assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.'

'The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.'

StF 231 – The silent stars shine down on us

- 1) The silent stars shine down on us
With bright but sightless eye,
Unmindful of our little earth,
Of us who live and die.
Are we but grains of stranded sand
Beside a cosmic sea
That lie unvalued and unseen
In such immensity?
- 2) Creator of all stars, you came
To grace our transient race.
In Christ you spoke a Word that broke
The silences of space.
Still through that Word you call our hearts
To know that we are known,
To trust we do not walk through time
Unvalued and alone.
- 3) We see the star the wise men saw
And hope again is stirred.
We track the footprints left in time
By your incarnate Word.
We see them climb a lonely hill
Where Love is left to die -
The Love that formed the farthest star
And hears the faintest cry.
- 4) O Christ, the bright and morning Star
Whose radiance does not fade,
Whose glory filled the universe
Before the planets played:
Come, heal our hearts of blinding doubt
Till faith shall end in sight.
Shine down upon our darkened earth
And conquer sin's long night.

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Reading: Luke 2:22-38

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons'.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.'

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: '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.'

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Sermon

The roots of Candlemas are in the Jewish Law. Forty days after the birth of a child there was a ceremony signifying purification of the mother and presentation of the child to the Lord. In our gospel reading, the parents of Jesus took him to Jerusalem for this purpose. The passage describes, through the words of Simeon, Jesus being a light for revelation to the Gentiles, that is the whole world beyond the Jewish people. This reference to light is the reason that the feast has been associated with candles.

If Christmas on 25th December is counted as day 1, Candlemas occurs on day 40, which falls on 2nd February. In many churches, especially in Eastern Europe, Candlemas marks the end of the Christmas celebrations, so if, like me, you haven't taken your decorations down yet, it's no problem; you have several more days! I often think: why settle for 12 days of Christmas when you can have 40! The downside might be that we need someone to write another 28 verses for the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas". Some churches keep their Nativity scene on view until Candlemas, and some keep their Advent ring until then, continuing to light the candles for their services.

There has been a tradition until at least the 7th Century that at Candlemas churches bless the candles that will be used in worship in the year to come, hence the name of the feast. The 2nd February is also a mid-point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, leading to a bizarre link with Groundhog Day in North America! A piece of weather lore says that if the groundhog (a type of burrowing rodent of the marmot family) emerges from its underground home on the 2nd February and sees its shadow (signifying clear weather) then it will retreat to its burrow and winter will persist for six more weeks. If the day is cloudy then spring is just around the corner. There's the quirky fact of the day for you! I doubt whether there is any meteorological veracity to it, but it's quaint nonetheless.

In our passage from Luke, the Greek word used to describe the presentation of Jesus in the Temple is *parastesai*, which means to present, but it can also mean to offer. Taking the second meaning, it prefigures the offering of Jesus on the cross for our sins. We see the two elderly devout Jewish people, Simeon and Anna. Because of their lifelong devotion and listening to God, they recognise that Jesus is the Messiah who has come not only to be the Saviour of Jerusalem and Israel but also a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles. Hence, light features strongly in the theme of this service.

I have given something of the background, but what does this mean for us today? Let me focus on Simeon and Anna for a moment. They were devout people who were in touch with and guided by God. Are we the same? Are we sufficiently tuned in to the Scriptures and sensitive to God's Holy Spirit that we recognise God's work when we see it?

Let us explore the presentation of Jesus and what this means for us. As the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is foreshadowed, this reminds us that, as the book of Hebrews says, Jesus is our great High Priest who is the offering for our sins. Trusting in him, we can know ourselves to be forgiven, once and for all. We are released from past, present and future sins, and the guilt that goes along with them. We are set free to serve God and others without guilt, because the work of the High Priest is done, complete for ever, and he is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. As the hymn says, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin." Yes, the sin is cancelled. It has no further hold upon us. We are accepted by God now and for ever. Simeon states that Jesus is a light that will bring revelation to the Gentiles, so let us explore the theme of light and examine what this means for us.

As living beings we need both light and darkness. God made both in the beginning and separated them from one another so that we have light for our work and the darkness for our rest. Light is needed for plants to grow to provide food for us, so it is necessary for our own growth and health. Light helps us to find where we are going, so that we have direction. Jesus called himself the Light of the World. That light of Christ is necessary for our lives so that we can grow and become healthy spiritually. The light of Christ gives us direction in our lives.

Light can also be beautiful. Picture a rainbow, a cluster of stars or a display of the northern lights. In the same way, Jesus is beautiful too, because he is perfect love, mercy and grace. As we allow him to dwell within us, that beauty shines through us more and more. In this feast of Candlemas, let us examine our own devotion to God. Let us invite the Holy Spirit to fill us and direct our lives as we pray, worship and study the Scriptures. Let us be assured that once we accept God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven once and for all and have no power over us. There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Let us also recognise Jesus as the light of our lives and pray, "Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us in all of your glory and beauty." Amen.

StF 176 – Like a candle flame

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| 1) Like a candle flame,
Flickering small in our darkness.
Uncreated light, shines through infant eyes. | 2) Stars and angels sing,
Yet the earth sleeps in shadows;
Can this tiny spark set a world on fire? |
| <i>Ch) God is with us, alleluia. (God is with us, alleluia.)
Come to save us, alleluia. (Come to save us.)
Alleluia!</i> | 3) Yet his light shall shine
From our lives, Spirit blazing,
As we touch the flame
Of his holy fire. |

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Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

We thank you, Lord, that in Jesus you have given us a strong advocate who knows our weaknesses and intercedes for us. In him we are assured of eternal life and we know that we can never be separated from his love. **Amen.**

In the beginning you created heaven and earth, yet we have treated them as if they were our own to exploit as we please. We pray that you help us to value your creation and steward it well. You separated light from darkness, yet human beings have mixed them up. We have wasted light at night time, obscuring the stars and confusing animals, birds, reptiles and insects such that biodiversity is depleted. Grant us wisdom to tread lightly upon the earth, so that our natural world is blessed. Where there is greed upon earth, let it be replaced by generosity and wisdom.

L: Jesus, Light of the World **R: shine upon us**

You determined the places on earth where nations might live, and you call them to dwell together in harmony, yet today many countries are at odds with one another. We bring to you the parts of the world where there are wars and conflicts, and areas with unjust governments. We pray for the Ukraine. We bring to you Afghanistan and other nations in turmoil. Grant peace to the world, including our nation and the Holy Land where Jesus once walked.

L: Jesus, Light of the World **R: shine upon us**

You made the world perfect, without death or disease or sorrow of any kind, yet today there are many who suffer. We bring to you those who are ill, people who sorrow, the bereaved, people nearing the end of their earthly lives, and those who are facing difficult situations and needing comfort or wisdom. Grant them all that they need to be more than conquerors through Christ.

L: Jesus, Light of the World **R: shine upon us**

You have given us your Holy Spirit to be our guide. Grant to our circuit and churches the wisdom and vision to follow your way to spiritual and numerical growth. Anoint our Ministers and members of your church, the body of Christ, with power and authority to proclaim your Word in our locality, united with people of all denominations that have allegiance to Jesus our Saviour.

L: Jesus, Light of the World **R: shine upon us**

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

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 59 – Lord the light of your love is shining

1) Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me.

*Ch) Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory;
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy;
Send forth Your word, Lord,
And let there be light.*

2) Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,
From the shadows into Your radiance;
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me.

3) As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness,
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.
Shine on me, shine on me.

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Blessing

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father our Creator, the Son our Light of the World, and the Holy Spirit our Comforter, Challenger and Companion, be amongst us and remain with us now and for ever. **Amen.**