

Candlemas Homily

Last week, we heard of Jesus' first miracle at Cana. Today, 40 days after the birth of Christ, Jesus is a baby again! Chronology is not especially important to the different Gospel writers but the Presentation or, Purification, is. It was important for Mary and Joseph to do what was expected 'according to the law of Moses' and in the holiest of cities, Jerusalem.

Dr Luke is quick to surprise us with some important new characters for whom the Temple is their spiritual home: Simeon and Anna appear to be 'hijacking' this solemn moment of Jewish ceremony and practice. They take on a kind of 'grandparent' role with a dramatic rush of attention or even, 'smothering' - so much so, that when Simeon took the child Jesus in his arms, there were no complaints as such but only mention of his parents being 'amazed at what was being said about him'.

Even choirs who sing the Nunc Dimittis as a matter of routine sometimes forget the context of these revolutionary words. Simeon is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New. He has waited for this single moment before he died to see, hold and keep this Jesus tight, this child destined to be the source of the world's salvation, the one to transform our darkness into light. But he warns Mary, it will be painful for her, costly, heart-breaking.

We know how the story will end. We have had centuries to unpick what must have been sheer mystery to the holy family – a bit like meeting a benevolent sage – and saying to one another around the kitchen table as the years went on: 'What did he say?' 'What did she mean'? Everything Simeon and Anna said was directed to God in praise, the starting point of all our prayer or song.

But neither were wedded to the building, to that great temple shrine of Jerusalem which would fall, and fall again.

They were united in their seeing for themselves and knowing for themselves what you and I now see and know. That this child was to become and still is for all time, the Saviour of the world, the one destined by God and chosen by God to make our lives shine with His light and wisdom, His grace and truth, His gift of letting us hold him close.

It is that sense of embrace and touch we are all yearning for when this pandemic is finally conquered, not least grandparents reaching out for their grandchildren in the ways they used to. But we can and do still say our prayers, however repetitive, or however infrequent. Such is the bridge and meeting place between God and us. That's a very safe place to be, knowing that we are loved and precious to the One who made us, patiently nurtured us, and still blesses us. AMEN.