

Sunday 28th January 2024; Candlemass/Presentation of Christ

Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling

Welcome to you all on this Candlemas day also called The Presentation of Christ in the Temple and also referred to as The Purification of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

Today we are participating in an ancient festival that has been observed throughout the Christian church for at least the three hundred years. This Feast commemorates the occasion when Mary and Joseph, in obedience to Jewish Law, went to the Temple in Jerusalem for Mary to be purified forty days after the birth of her Son, Jesus, and to present the child to God as their first-born.

From this custom derives the order for 'The Churching of Women' in the Book of Common Prayer, which was said by the priest to welcome new mothers back into the life of the parish after recovering from childbirth, with the words, *'Forasmuch as it pleased Almighty God of His goodness to give you safe deliverance, and hath preserved you in the great danger of child birth, you shall therefore give hearty thanks unto God'*. Although this practise has largely disappeared, while working on the Labour Unit at Hull Royal Infirmary, I tried to offer the thanksgiving for a successful birth, which were always very special moments.

Mary too must have been looking forward to her special moment and would have been full of pride as she and Joseph made their way to the Temple to present Jesus. However, they were probably not expecting to be greeted by two elderly worshippers who had been moved by the Holy Spirit after a lifetime of devotion and were waiting for this moment. For them, the Lord had come into his Temple.

As Jesus was presented, he was placed into Simeon's pious, aged, and faithful hands: flesh upon flesh, human upon human, God Incarnate. Simeon, who according to St. Luke, had spent a lifetime waiting in obedience and devotion for Israel's Messiah, now saw and touched what he already perceived by faith; the Father had kept his promise and taking the infant Jesus into his hands, he proclaims, what we now know as the Nunc Dimittis.

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

Faithful Simeon must have wept tears of joy and consolation. His long years of patient hoping and waiting, have been vindicated. His faithful prayers had been answered. For him and the world, God had come, and he now held him in his arms.

Amazed by this, Mary and Joseph now meet Anna, the elderly prophetess, another faithful soul, hoping for salvation. The Holy Spirit speaks also through her, recognising the long-awaited Saviour and in so doing, is the first evangelist who discerns God speaking to her. Both she and Simeon can discern so much because they have spent a lifetime patiently waiting and listening to God. This entire story is about love revealed: by two parents love for their child, by Simeon and Anna's love for God, and by God's love for His people which is immeasurable and unceasing.

In Simeon and Anna, we see long lives that are obedient, patient, and faithful. We often hear it said in our churches, 'we need more young people', and that is true, but it is also true that we need to recognise, value, and give thanks for those who like Simeon and Anna have spent a

lifetime in prayer, devotion and service to their faith and church. Simeon and Anna are wonderful role models for us for us all. That kind of discipleship, following Jesus, staying faithful and committed day in day out, year in year out, through the highs and lows, the joys, and the heartaches, is surely worthy of tribute today.

So, as I look around today, I give thanks for you all, and especially today, those of you who are a bit older than me, the 'Simeon's' and the 'Anna's', I give thanks to God for you.

Amen.