

Sunday 1st February 2026: Presentation of Christ/ Candlemas

*“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy
salvation”.*

Familiar words from the mouth of Simeon in today's Gospel which have come down to us as part of the 'Nunc Dimitis', or 'Song of Simeon,' words said in the BCP Evening Prayer and often set to music, also words in the Church of England funeral service, words I said at the committal of Jean Thompson at her funeral on Wednesday, words of comfort and conviction.

The story of the presentation of Christ, the story of Mary and Joseph bringing the forty-day old baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, is beautifully comforting. Perhaps the comfort comes from the story itself, the encounters with the saintly Simeon and Anna; from memories that go with the song of Simeon, the words he utters when he takes the baby Jesus into his arms and worships Him after a long life waiting in faith, like Anna.

But is worship meant to be only an experience of being gently comforted? Is it not also meant to disturb us? When we are confronted with the greatness and wonder and glory of God found in Jesus Christ, when we think of the reality of God, is not there an impulse not to be just gently comforted, but to actually go to seek out this God, in the way that Simeon and Anna went to the Temple to seek the coming of God's Kingdom?

Simeon knows that meeting with Jesus is something disturbing, when he says to Mary, "*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 doesn't seem to be anything

comforting here. Simeon describes how the child will become someone against whom people grumble, against whom they will conspire, against whom they will tell lies, and will prepare a plan to bring about his death.

Jesus brings disturbance into the lives of those whom he meets, for Simeon and Anna that disturbance meant great comfort and joy; for many others it would be the disturbing reality about themselves. The presentation of Christ in the Temple was a moment of such emotional disturbance for Simeon that he felt that his long life had been fulfilled, that he could now die in peace knowing that he had caught a glimpse of a future in God's hands, brought about by this Jesus in his arms.

The story of Jesus being brought to the Temple, of Simeon and Anna meeting this baby, is told by Luke, who goes on to also write the Acts of the Apostles. When reading the story of those early years of the church and you see the disturbance that an encounter with Jesus brings into people's lives. The life and the drive of the church in its early years came from this fact, that people had disturbing experiences that meant life could never be the same again, disturbed by their experience of God, and they allowed themselves to be disturbed out of their old way of life in order to live a new life in Jesus.

In his seminal work, "Confessions", St Augustine spoke of this sense of being disturbed on one hand but the comfort of new life on the other, *"What is that which gleams through me and smites my heart without wounding it? I am both a-shudder and a-glow. A shudder, in so far as I am unlike it, a glow in so far as I am like it."*

John Wesley spoke of a similar experience of being disturbed and comforted in a life changing way, *"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He*

had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Like Simeon and Anna, to be one of God’s people, we must too be disturbed, for a sword to pierce our souls, in order to be saved, because the Christian life is not about staying the same or staying in the past; it is a pilgrim life, it is about moving on, transformed in Christ and living as His disciples.

If we do not allow ourselves to be disturbed, we miss an opportunity of knowing there is more to life than the here and now, and to disturb others by revealing that new life to others. In meeting with Jesus, Simeon and Anna felt a sense of God’s disturbing peace. For us to experience the same peace, we must first be disturbed. Are you willing to be confronted with Jesus Christ, be disturbed and then comforted with the peace the world cannot give? By the candlelight of Candlemas, are you willing to continue your spiritual journey and say with Simeon, “*mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*”.

Thanks be to God. Amen.