

OT: Haggai 2.1-9

NT: John 2.18-22

Today, we keep the feast of the Purification, Candlemas, when we mark the end of the Christmas season and turn our faces to Lent which will be with us in just over a couple of weeks. Today we see Jesus as he comes for the first time into the Temple, into the house of his Father, revealing himself as Jesus Christ as true God and true man by the power of the Holy Spirit. And guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon holds the child and knows with absolute certainty that God has fulfilled his promise as he always knew he would. His prayer is one that many of us say daily, one we have said this evening:

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.

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles:

And to the glory of thy people Israel.

It's a prayer for life, the rejoicing that God is in our midst, that the darkness will not overcome the light. And yet it is a prayer so strongly associated with death as in faith and hope we send the departed onto eternal life. However this prayer is said, it does signal change. From death to eternal life, from the baby Jesus at Christmas to the man embarking on his ministry of salvation which will lead to the cross on Calvary and onto the glory of the Resurrection.

As we see the slow return of the light as the days lengthen and there is a promise of the warmth and brightness to come, it is a reminder that in our lives we are striving through prayer and worship to move ever closer to the light of Christ, to embrace his promise of hope and salvation, to be caught up in the love of the God, that unlike Simeon, we have yet to physically see.

But life can feel grim at times. We can feel surrounded by struggle, a growing sense of financial gloom for many people, the threat and the reality of wars across our world. When we see that those who should act with responsibility for the greater good appear to be more concerned for themselves and their immediate clique. When it feels that division and not our common humanity is prevalent and the voice of the angry appears to drown out those speaking up for justice and peace.

Let us remember that we do not walk this world alone, that we can be certain that God, through Jesus, wishes to completely immerse himself in our human condition so that we may one day be fully immersed into the nature of God. And by taking on our flesh and blood, Jesus fully understands our human condition and can be our guide and companion on our journey to eternal life.

Let us remember too that we carry the light of Christ in our hearts, that at our baptism we were charged with carrying that light out into the world. Let us go on with hope. Let us not be overwhelmed but rather live for each day, working to try and make a difference where we stand with the gifts and grace with which

we have been blessed. As the light shines out, dispelling the darkness so we can bring hope and comfort and joy to our world.

And if some days, it all feels a bit too much, and such days are inevitable, because after all we're only human, let us remember that name of hope and comfort, Emmanuel. God is with us.

Revd Michelle Montrose