

Presentation of Christ in the Temple

A Sword will Pierce your Own Heart

A sermon preached by Rev. Jane Kraft at St. Michael & All Angels Church, Sandhurst on Sunday 31st January 2021.

Readings: Hebrews 2:14-18; Psalm 84; Luke 2:22-40

As an Anglican, one of the things I hold very dear is the rhythm of the seasons. The preparation time of Advent for Christmas. The reflective period through Lent and Holy week followed by the glorious celebrations of Easter, and even the long weeks of Trinity which speak to us of us growth: and so the year comes round again. There is a particular sense of movement which if we are in harmony with it reminds us that we too, like the seasons move from one stage to another throughout our lives. Over the last year this rhythm has been disturbed in all sorts of ways by the covid pandemic. Today we celebrate the feast of Candlemas as we remember the Holy Family's visit to the Temple in Jerusalem. Some of you are in church in person for many like me you are shielding at home and joining in online. Things are different for each one of us but we all look forward to happier times when we can meet friends, socialise with family and hug loved ones. For many this past year has been a dark time in our lives and we long for the light.

Candlemas is a pivotal moment in the seasons of the church as we turn from focusing on the crib to looking towards the cross. It is associated with light as we remember the the coming of the light of the world to shine in our darkness the light Simeon said which would be a light to the gentiles. But Simeon also pointed to the path which the Christ child was to take to fulfil His vocation and today we move forward as we recall that Christ was born to die for our salvation.

Simeon's parting words to Mary as the family left the Temple are a poignant reminder that Jesus Mother, who shared so much of His life, in her love for him, shared in His sufferings too. Love makes us vulnerable and it is this vulnerability which opens us to experience the empathic pain of the beloved's suffering.

When Gabriel came to Mary, she must have been terrified, but his first words were of reassurance. "Do not be afraid." The first thing to remember about God's call to service is that we are not to be afraid. Uncertainty breeds apprehension. Quite understandably Mary is perplexed, and the substance of the angel's message only increases her bewilderment, and she asks the question how will all this come about? In response she receives the angel's reassurances her that with God all things are possible.

Despite not really understanding what really lay ahead for her, Mary was willing to answer God's call. It was to mean a complete change. Life for Mary would never be the same again. She could have said no. Instead, she responded with the words "Here am I the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Mary said yes to God, not may be, not alright but..... It was an unconditional yes in complete obedience and commitment.

Mary's response to her call be the mother of Jesus involved not just an acceptance of the pregnancy which was to follow but the continued sustained committed acceptance that the whole of her life was in God's hands. Mary had a hard task for her call to service was as Simeon foretold, one that would lead her through suffering.

And so it was, - we hear of her being reproached with the words “my hour has not yet come”, when she tried to persuade Jesus into using his power to solve a crisis at the wedding in Cana. She was always there in the background, caring, loving and supporting. Hers was to be a life of self-effacing commitment right through to the moment when Jesus hour had come, and she stood at the foot of the cross and watched him die. And still she was there in the upper room, together with Jesus disciples in prayer and devotion as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Our earthly life is a journey into the unknown, it was for Mary and is for us. In our apprehension and uncertainty and also in our suffering, often all we can cling to in faith is the hope that He is present in each situation.

At the crucifixion Mary watched the agony of her son.

Jesus hour had come and the horror of what was happening must have been almost overwhelming.

At Candlemas which we will observe today, our thoughts turn from the manger to the cross as we approach Lent and Holy Week and remember that Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, by his death and resurrection, opened for us the way back into a right relationship with God. Help us who have at the Christmas season greeted the Light of the world never to forsake the light of Christ.

Graham Kendrick wrote this:-

Beauty for brokenness
Hope for despair
Lord, in the suffering
This is our prayer
Bread for the children
Justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset
Your kingdom increase

God of the poor
Friend of the weak
Give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts
Let tears fall like rain
Come, change our love
From a spark to a flame

Let us pray

“Father of all we give you thanks and praise that, when we were still far of you met us in your son and brought us home dying and living, he declared your love gave us grace and opened the gate of glory.”