

## **A Light to the Nations by Rev Jane Kraft**

### **St Michael's 9.30 Candlemas 2022**

A few years ago, the term liberation theology was the great topic of conversation in academic Christian circles. Gradually it made its way into the churches and became a talking point in local parish Study groups. Liberation theology is a movement which understands the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of a liberation from unjust political, economic, or social conditions. The movement began in South America where there was perceived to be a huge need for political and social deliverance. The idea of the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate was challenged and the concept that each person should accept the station and circumstance into which they were born or found themselves was confronted. For the poor and powerless under oppressive regimes, the idea that that the genuine Christian should be one who takes up the cause of the weak and powerless was a whole new concept. Our epistle this morning centres on liberation. Its focus is on the greatest deliverance of all. Not the deliverance from social and political oppression but from the

power of sin and death which is brought about through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection.

These three elements were essential for our liberation to be accomplished.

Over the last weeks we have heard told again the story of the nativity.

Jesus' birth as a baby in Bethlehem emphasises that he is wholly human, yet we moved rapidly on to Epiphany and the manifestation of Christ as God's Son; in his Baptism, through his first miracle at Cana and in the coming of the wise men with their gifts of Gold Frankincense and Myrrh.

It is in these three events that we discern his divinity and are drawn to look more deeply into the essential elements which were to bring about the liberation of our fallen humanity.

The wise men's precious gifts are a means through which we comprehend the full nature of Christ and His destiny.

They gave Gold, in this we recognise His kingship not of an earthly realm but of the kingdom of heaven.

Frankincense speaks to us of His priesthood, reminding of us that He is the one true sacrifice for the atonement for our sins, a sacrifice made that we might be liberated and restored into a right relationship with God.

And myrrh foretells His death, the means of our redemption (our liberation).

So the narrative moves on and we read that Mary and Joseph went up to the temple to make an offering in obedience to the Jewish Law, an act which reiterates for the reader Christ's humanity, but also emphasises the devout obedience to the Jewish rites, on the part of his earthly parents.

On arrival they were met by two elderly, faithful and pious Jews. In Simeon's meeting with the infant Jesus, we look back through Israel's history and are reminded of the story of Samuel and the elderly Eli in the Temple. This is just one significant event in the pilgrimage of God's people, but it puts the events that are to follow solidly into place as part of a continuing story.

A pilgrimage is, by definition, a moving onwards and forwards. You cannot make a journey and stay in the same place. So, while the meeting triggers a reminiscence of the past, old Simeon bids us look forward. He has lived his whole life in expectation and longing for an event in the future and now the moment has come when he sees his longing fulfilled.

The Israelite people looked on the Temple as the place where they could meet God. Here in the Temple, Simeon recognised in the infant Jesus, the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies. At this moment The Old moves on into the New. Expectation turns to fulfilment, the glory of Israel becomes a light to the nations, and salvation is declared not just for the Jews but for all people.

But the longed-for deliverance that the Messiah brought did not take the form that the Jews expected. No triumphal victory and release from Roman domination and oppression. The road that Jesus took was a different way.

Simeon said Jesus was to be a light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of Israel.

John in his Gospel may not have a birth narrative but he emphasizes for his readers right at the outset, that the True Light which enlightens all people came into the world to be light shining in the darkness; but he goes further this light is a light of all people irrespective of race or colour, gender or sexual orientation, or social standing.

I don't know if you have ever been in a situation where there is a complete absence of light not even a chink or dull glow. If you have you will understand that it is very disorientating. One cannot tell which way one is facing, how far away the walls or furniture are, or even whether the time is day or night.

For those who are completely blind this is an environment in which they live all the time but for most of us complete darkness is a frightening and restricting experience. We need the light to function properly.

As Christians we are called to live in the light not just a physical light but spiritually in the light of Christ who came to dispel the darkness.

Light and darkness are a significant theme which runs through the baptism service. At the conclusion, the newly baptized are given candles lit from the pascal candle, the reminder of the resurrection of Christ the Light of the World. They, and those who stand with them to support them, are sent out to shine as lights in the world to the glory of God. At the end of this service we will turn and focus our attention on the font the place of Baptism. It is a pivotal moment as we shift our thoughts from celebrating the events of Christmas and Epiphany and look towards Lent. It is a moment when we can take the opportunity to remember our own Baptism, the promises that were made and the commission we received to be Christ's lights in the world for all people.