Order of Service

# Candlemas: January 31st 2021

## Welcome

A very warm welcome to you, and thank you for tuning in with us today. Today we celebrate Candlemas which is a holy day, commemorating the presentation of Jesus Christ at the Temple.

My name is Mark Poole and I am the curate of the four parishes here in Stockton on the Forest, Warthill, Holtby and Dunnington.

It is our privilege and our joy to bring you this act of worship today and we pray that it will bless you and

sustain you on your journey, especially during these times.

As we gather from scattered lives in this way let us recognise the presence of God with us and rejoice.

And so, let us pray.

### Collect

Almighty and ever-living God,

clothed in majesty,

whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple,

in substance of our flesh;

grant that we may be presented to you

with pure and clean hearts,

by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

## Preparation

The end of the Christmas season draws near.

Forty days to contemplate the wonder and the mystery of God born as a baby:

the infinite, abandoned to our broken world;

the creator, created;

creation’s foundation, found in a stable.

And now Candlemas arrives, on the edge of Christmas and looking to Lent,

with its reminder that all joy is mixed with pain,

and the lightest soul can be pierced with a sword:

a lesson that we are living, individually and communally, in these difficult times.

Deepest winter is past, but the spring is not here.

Light flickers, but does not blaze.

So we wait at this door.

We pause at this threshold, and we pray.

Anna the prophet, decade upon decade, with fasting and prayer, bore faithful witness in your temple.

May we too be strengthened and sustained, in body, mind and spirit.

May we wait like Anna: anticipating, alert and watchful.

Simeon, ready to be guided by the Spirit, believed your promise.

May we too have trust in your goodness and love for us.

May we wait like Simeon: confident, quiet and hopeful.

Anna, with wonder and passion, praised your name and revealed the Saviour to all who were ready to hear.

Simeon, his patience rewarded, gave you thanks and prophesied to Mary.

May we too be ready to proclaim your good news to all who are lost.

And at your touch, may we awaken like Anna and Simeon: praising and rejoicing.

## Hymn: Awake, awake

Awake, awake: fling off the night!

For God has sent his glorious light;

and we who live in Christ’s new day

must works of darkness put away.

Awake and rise, in Christ renewed,

and with the Spirit’s power endued.

The light of life in us must glow,

and fruits of truth and goodness show.

Let in the light; all sin expose

to Christ, whose life no darkness knows.

Before his cross for guidance kneel;

his light will judge and, judging, heal.

Awake, and rise up from the dead,

and Christ his light on you will shed.

Its power will wrong desires destroy,

and your whole nature fill with joy.

Then sing for joy, and use each day;

give thanks for everything alway.

Lift up your hearts; with one accord

praise God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Reading: Malachi 3.1-5

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgement.

## Penitence

Draw near to us, O God. You know our weaknesses, and you love us still.

You know every unworthy thought and every unkind act, and you love us still.

We are sorry for those times when we have been provoked to anger or despair, to malice or sharpness.

When we are tested, may we be filled with your strength and refined in the fire of your love.

In our time of trial, may we turn to you, in the sure and certain hope that the light of your love will guide us.

Give us that peace beyond our understanding and

that forgiveness beyond our deserving.

We touch the hem of your garment,

we see through a glass darkly,

but your love is stronger than our weakness,

and in your light, we are redeemed, refreshed and renewed.

## Gospel reading: Luke 2:22-40

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Luke.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
 according to your word;

for my eyes have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel.’

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

## Candlemas chant

This child shall be the falling of many.

This child shall be the rising of many.

This child shall be a light.

This child shall be the light of the world.

## Sermon

As I stand here in St Nicholas Church I have our Nativity scene beside me, for today, or more accurately February 2nd is a pivotal day in the Church calendar, but more of that later.

We have already heard the word Candlemas, but we also associate the words ‘presentation’ and ‘purification’ with today. So let us have a think about what they mean, or meant and what we can take from them for us today.

Candlemas is one of the oldest feasts celebrated in the Church. The candles for the year ahead in church would be blessed and if we were in church today we would have been given a candle and would walk, at the end of the service, in procession with them as the Nunc Dimittis is sung, as a reminder of the journey Mary and Joseph took with Christ the light of the world, into the Temple.

Mary and Joseph, like all good Jews, were taking their first born male to the Temple, at forty days of age. This is known as the presentation of Christ in the Temple, and while they were there they offered a sacrifice of two turtle doves.

It was also the custom then, and now for some, to pray for the purification of the mother and for the health of the child, again part of the Jewish law.

Not only do we have Mary and Joseph obeying the Jewish law, we also have them meeting two people and with lives changed for ever. Simeon and Anna spent much of their time praying and waiting in the Temple. They had both been promised, by God, that they would not die until they had met Jesus. Each day as they got older they must have wondered, will today be the day.

Simeon knew immediately that this family was no ordinary family and took Jesus in his arms and praised God in the words we now call the Nunc Dimittis.

Anna also recognised that this baby was the baby they had been waiting for, for the redemption of Israel.

Simeon and Anna were two devout old people who in the familiar setting of the Temple recognised that this was no ordinary baby in his mother’s arms. Simeon asked no more of life, but before giving Jesus back to Mary had some disturbing words, about his future for her for not only would Jesus suffer, but Mary also, and she would be unable to help or save him.

Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph but also warns them of the shadowy side of this glory and salvation. In his life on earth and still today Jesus is a controversial figure. He still attracts opposition from some who encounter him; he still challenges our thoughts and beliefs when they stray from the way and the truth; he still brings about our own self-judgment in the way we respond to him.

Mary and Joseph must have been embarrassed by this interruption for what should have been a quiet and in some ways personal ceremony. They were interrupted in their offering by two out of the ordinary people. They then speak about how special this baby is.

I wonder if you have times when you want to slip quietly into and out of church, whether on a Sunday or during the week, but are interrupted by someone or something. It is in the interruptions and disturbances that God often speaks to us. Simeon is open to the guiding of the Spirit. We don’t know how the Spirit told Simeon to go to the temple that day. Did Simeon get a dig in the ribs while a voice said “hey, Simeon, get to the Temple now”; or was it a thought that gently unfolded in his mind as he went about his daily routines? It’s always worth allowing time and space in our lives to listen and watch so that the Holy Spirit can get a message across to us.

Let us go back to those words of Simeon, to be a light for the revelation of the Gentiles. Christ was to be the light of the world. The candles we light each week for worship, or at times when Christians gather for prayer or perhaps for our own prayer time are a continual reminder to us of this.

Jesus wants us to shine as lights for Him. If we know Jesus to be someone special in our lives we will shine for him, for that smile is not just on our faces but comes from inside us. Wherever we go we must be ready to share Christ with those we are with. It may be through words, or actions or it may be in our smile.

And so why today is a pivotal day in the Church year. Today falls between the birth and the passion of Christ. In those forty days since Christmas we have been thinking about those birth narratives and the events of those early days of Christ.

Simeon recognised Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s promises to his people, and his words take us forward to Jesus suffering and death. It may be much less challenging to us to leave Jesus, as a baby in the manger, but the facts don’t allow us to. In presenting our own lives to God as living sacrifices, we must be aware of the consequences. If we’re going to follow the way of Jesus, our eyes must be open to the realities of denying ourselves and taking up our cross.

So are we ready to leave Christ in the manger, and to turn towards the passion of Christ. We will soon be in the season of Lent. A time that we can use to consider what following Christ can mean to each one of us. It is also a time that we can use to help us to prepare for the passion of Christ.

So let us pray.

Lord, as your glory was revealed to Simeon, give us the faith and hope that he knew. Let us remember that your time is not as our time, and that your message may come at any stage in human life. Keep us ready to hear your voice and to know the strength of the salvation that has been opened to all people.

Amen.

## Intercessions

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ancient of Days.

Through Christ our Saviour, our darkness is turned to light.

Through the Holy Spirit your love burns within us, bearing witness to your truth.

Blessed be God for ever.

Lord, we turn to you and ask for your blessing and healing:

for ourselves, for each other, for humanity and all your creation.

There is no darkness that your light cannot overcome.

There is no desperation that your renewing fire cannot banish.

There is no sorrow and pain that your touch cannot heal.

We pray for those we love: for our friends, our family and our neighbours.

As we remember the joy and happiness that they have brought us,

we remember too the sadness and difficulty of being apart.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on all those who are separated by the pandemic.

Even when contact is difficult, may we remain one,

through our prayers and through our care and love for one another.

We pray for the world. For all places where there is conflict and violence;

where there is injustice, exclusion, inequality;

where poverty is widespread, or is found in the midst of plenty.

Your light touches all, and all are loved by you.

May we extend that love to one another,

and strive for justice, respect and wholeness for all.

We pray for those who suffer, in body, mind or spirit,

and for all who watch over them, all who care for them, and all who pray for them.

When darkness descends, when the future is uncertain,

may they see your light on the horizon.

Bring healing according your will, grant them strength and peace

and the joy and reassurance of your presence.

We give thanks for the life of our sister, the Reverend Mary Willetts,

whose funeral was held this week.

We pray for all those who mourn.

May the light of your love bring them comfort,

for the same fire of Christ burns within us all, and we are one.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ancient of Days.

May your light, shining in the world, guide our footsteps,

may your fire, burning in our hearts, guide our actions,

and may your touch bring us, at the last, into the everlasting day of your kingdom.

Blessed be God for ever.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

## Hymn: Refiner’s fire

Purify my heart,

let me be as gold and precious silver.

Purify my heart,

let me be as gold, pure gold.

*Refiner's fire,*

*my heart's one desire*

*is to be holy,*

*set apart for you, Lord.*

*I choose to be holy,*

*set apart for you, my master,*

*ready to do your will.*

Purify my heart,

cleanse me from within and make me holy.

Purify my heart,

cleanse me from my sin, deep within.

Purify my heart,

let me be as gold and precious silver.

Purify my heart,

let me be as gold, pure gold.

## Blessing

Thank you to the many people who have planned, prepared and contributed to our worship today. We are blessed beyond measure, and grateful beyond words.

As we come to the end of the Christmas season, and our nativity sets are put away again until the end of the year, we begin to turn our hearts and minds from the Crib to the Cross, from Christ's birth to his passion. We pray that God will help us, for whom Lent is near, to enter deeply into the Easter mystery.

Let us pray:

Father, we have sung your praise with shepherds and angels:

may Christ be born in our hearts today.

We have shared in the joy of Simeon and Anna;

help us, like them, to trust your word.

We have greeted Jesus, the light of the world;

may we be filled with the light of your love.

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,

fill you with radiance

and scatter the darkness from your path.

Christ, the Sun of Righteousness,

gladden your eyes and warm your heart.

Christ, the Dayspring from on high,

draw near to guide your feet into the way of peace.

And the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

Go in the light and peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.