

CANDLEMAS 2026

Last Sunday I asked you a rhetorical question – Would you invite St Paul back home with you for supper or, a cuppa? Thinking this week about Simeon and Anna, I would definitely be inviting them around to the Rectory; they are the ones with so many stories to tell us, so much wisdom to impart, so at home were they - with worship in the Temple, with the world of symbol and ritual, with the words of prophecy and poetry – so familiar were they with the great biblical narratives and most of all, the joy with which they proclaimed the Saviour in their midst.

We sometimes forget that, as with St Paul, the Jewish loyalties and discipline and religious praxis for Jesus' family was thoroughly Jewish. They didn't complain about this rite of purification and the sacrifice duly offered of a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons. So often, that sense of duty and faithfulness gets a bad press I am sorry to say. Joseph and Mary honoured their tradition to fulfil the Law of Moses and I suggest they did this willingly and lovingly.

But they could not have expected what was to follow. Simeon was clearly much-loved and well known, devout in both keeping and interpreting the faith they shared. In this intimate scene, and guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon reaches out for this infant Jesus to proclaim a very powerful, emotional 'epiphany' moment. He has been waiting long and hard for this moment which was utterly, completely

incarnational to see this vulnerable child as the long-awaited God with us, God, in person, God held in his very arms.

Tonight's Evensong, and every Evensong, would not be complete without this joyful burst of praise and happiness and fulfilment: the Nunc Dimittis. Verse 33 in St Luke's graphic account says what we often think and say to ourselves when we hear the Liturgy of the Word: 'the child's father and mother were amazed and what was being said about him.' How could they possibly know what kind of kingdom Jesus would create, live by, and die for? It was all too much to take in. And then Anna's presence confirmed and sealed what was to be an unforgettable occasion, something Mary and Joseph will have kept in their hearts and looked back upon – thoughtfully, prayerfully, with a great sense of thanksgiving and pride and joy.

Of course there are similarities with this rite of passage with our own at Baptism. These are times when we look to our past, to history and tradition and then to live out the present, pointing us to the unknown future – who we will become, how we will grow, whether we will find fulfilment as well as the Lord's favour? These are great existential questions and why today's Feast is a real turning point, a seasonal shift if you will, to our turning towards Lent. We hold up our candles recalling our baptism certainly, but also, we hold them up to declare the Light of the world in our midst whose flame can never be extinguished, or forgotten. This is the Light which embraces and carries us all for the rest of our days and yes, through all the ups and downs and difficulties, the sorrows

and the joys, which our Christian faith takes seriously, takes to heart.

The reason I said how much I would like to meet up with Simeon and Anna is because they are such a warm and human side of today's story. Not all of us have wonderful memories of parents or grandparents or teachers or colleagues at work.

But Simeon and Anna represent what potential and value old age can bring, not least their continuing gifts of kindness, wisdom and love. And not least, their lack of embarrassment about their worshipping lives. These weren't occasions once a month or on high days and holy days only. Their prayer and their praise for their God was constant and as regular as their heartbeat – and that's the source of their living well, I believe - inspiring others, and supporting the weak or weary, and lost. When we look back and ponder, there's always a person and a life who has brought us to the waters of faith to find there our true home and dwelling place. There's always a person who has shown us the ways which lead to God's calm indwelling to give us courage to be faithful, and live hope-filled lives. Simeon and Anna teach us why blessings matter and endure.

At this darkest time of the year, I would want to give them a memento of their coming to the Rectory, a thank you if you like for being great grandparents of the faith, steadfast and sure – some snowdrops, of course - bursting forth, gloriously

white and bold, ever hopeful that spring will come again, and
Easter too!

Glory be....

AMEN.