

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday - Candlemas

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and glory of Israel:
make your home among us,
and present us pure and holy
to your heavenly Father,
your God and our God.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 31st January 2021

Malachi 3:1-5

3 "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. **3** He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, **4** and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

5 "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reading from the Gospel of Luke 2:22-40

Jesus Presented in the Temple

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the

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Lord^[a]), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."^[a]

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss^[a] your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.^[a] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

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A reflection from Revd David Newton, lead minister in Comberton, Toft and Caldecote

Candlemas is a Feast that revolves around the metaphor of sight. An old man, who – as tradition has it – was blind, is the one who sees in this babe the saviour of the world. He sees – more clearly than any other – that this babe will grow up to cause division and pain. He can see (or we might say imagine) that if Love enters the World, the World will turn its back, spit at it and try and destroy it.

Standing alongside Simeon is Anna the prophet. Prophets are those who see clearly where others see only shadows; they reveal the depth of how things really are, and so can imagine much more clearly what might be in the future.

No wonder then, that in tradition, this was the day chosen for all the candles in the churches to be replaced and blessed. Churches were filled with new light, as tall candles burned strong and the people could see clearly.

Today, we are called to stand with Simeon and see the glory of God in the face of Christ. (As Paul puts it in his second letter to Corinth). Had we been in the Temple that day we would have seen nothing extraordinary, no halos, no angels, no heavenly signs. We would have seen a simple family from Nazareth doing what the law commanded 40 days after birth. We would have seen two old eccentrics cooing over a baby and making ridiculous claims about this baby's future. In all likelihood, we would have thought little more of it – apart from perhaps how to get Simeon and Anna out of the Temple for good.

But, we would have missed the glory of God in the face of Christ.

As then, so now. For we cannot literally stand with Simeon and gaze into the face of this ordinary baby who would become our saviour. But we can – and indeed must – look around to see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Where then, might we find his face? This is the question for Candlemas. And the pray that goes with it is simply this... open the eyes of our hearts, that we might see clearly.

For, if we would have missed the glory of God in the face of Christ in the Temple, we are likely to miss it again now. Let me suggest therefore a few places where we might learn to see the face of Christ, and in seeing his face see all things more clearly.

The first, (and I make no apologise for the obviousness of this) is in prayer and, in particular, through silence and stillness. There is no substitute for quiet and slow

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contemplation. We look, we keep looking, we stare into the darkness and hope to see there a glimpse of the face of Christ. Make no mistake, this is not about reaching for a lofty spiritual experience, but rather finding Christ in the ordinary, mundane, and often frustrating experience of simple waiting and simple stillness. In that place we begin to ourselves and the world with greater clarity, we begin to see the love that holds us and holds the world, the presence that is forever faithful and is never our rival.

Part of our task as 'priestly people' is to be 'sentinels' – those watching on the walls, seeing what lies ahead, providing a prophetic voice into our society. Such a voice is needed more than ever. But we can only begin to scan the horizon with clear eyes if we have first looked to that other and ultimate horizon. Only once we have been blinded by the dazzling darkness of God, might we be able to look out from the city walls and see clearly.

Second, we see the face of Christ in all that lies around us this day. If we have eyes to see it, we can see his face reflected in the budding of the trees, the singing of the returning birds, the bulbs peeping through the earth. In such things we find the glory of God hidden in the ordinary beauty of the natural world.

We can see his face too as we look in the mirror, seeing something of God's glory in our own faces, each made to image God. That's true even if that image may be marred or broken; or even if you can't see it one jot.

And, perhaps more significantly still, we find Christ's face amidst the trials and struggles of this time. In lonely and claustrophobic living, in juggling home schooling and work, in facing boredom or fear, anxiety or stress... in those places the face of Christ is to be found.

For, as Simeon saw, that babe whom he took into his arms was not destined to walk amongst the powerful and successful with the world beneath his feet. That babe was destined for the cross. The glory of God was revealed in the Christ who was strung up on the tree, the glory of God was revealed in the very place of darkness and pain. Here we find the face of Christ. Here we learn to see rightly.

Third, we find the face of Christ in the faces of others. In every phone call, every zoom, every street encounter. In the face of the one vaccinating; in the face of the one volunteering; in the face of the neighbour who keeps an eye on us.

In every face who shows us something of hope, of faithfulness, of love in these days we see something of Christ. But so also in every face which we meet with hope, with faithfulness, with love, we see and draw out the hidden face of Christ in them.

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In the face of every other person, we can see the face of Christ.

Where else might we look? One final place... and that is inwardly, not so much to contemplate the divine, but to use our imaginations to find God's Glory in future and unknown worlds.

In our current claustrophobic lives, bounded and limited as they are our imaginations are a wonderful gift, allowing us to explore foreign fields that take us way beyond our current confinement. We can recreate half worn memories; we can imagine ourselves someplace else; we can dream up untold futures.

This week I have delved into the imaginative world of a wonderful novel, trod up K2 with those Nepalese climbers who made history last Saturday when they made the first ever Winter Ascent of the mountain, and immersed myself in the re-assuring hermetically sealed world of a board game.

Perhaps more significantly, we can begin to imagine what might be. We have been gifted we the incredible ability to see things that are not yet here, to imagine things being different. Using our imaginations is a sure way for us to become images of God, who breathed the universe into being, imagining something that was yet to exist. We too have the wonderful gift of imagining things that are not there: it is the gift that lies behind all inventions, it is the gift that lies behind vaccines and treatments, and it is the gift that allows us to build a better future.

There are so many ways in which we can use our imaginations to go beyond our current clouded and closed horizon. In doing so we find Christ who, yes, is here in this place, but who also wants to lead us to pastures new.

As individuals, as Lordsbridge churches who have learnt so much from sharing together, as communities, may we use our imaginations to find the glory of God in the face of Christ – hidden in the ordinary, unexpected things that lie ahead of us.

In looking up (contemplating), in looking down (to the struggles of this day), in looking out (to others), in looking beyond (imagining the future) may we find the glory of God in the face of Christ.

May we have eyes to see like Simeon and Anna.

Amen.