

2 February 2021



CANDLEMAS

A REFLECTION FROM ANDREW

Luke ch2 v22-40

Today is the Sunday before Candlemas, the actual date is always 2nd February, it is the last of the biblical stories that is connected to Christmas. Candlemas is a hinge in the Christian year between the crib of Christmas and the Lenten journey. This coming Wednesday it will be forty days since Christmas Day and a very different Christmas for all of us. Some people used to say that they had had a 'very quiet Christmas' celebrating it on their own or with one other person. Last year that was a phrase we could all identify with. If we put up Christmas decorations and cards are they already packed away? For some people the decorations are taken down at Candlemas. It has been suggested that the lights are kept up to give people a sign of joy and hope while the world goes through the pandemic and the winter months.

Today we think about the Presentation in the Temple. The words of the elderly man Simeon rather change that comfortable spirit of the Christmas story. He turns to Mary and tells her that 'a sword will pierce your own soul'. Suddenly the wonderful events of the birth of this baby have turned just a little threatening. Let me ask, how often have you heard this Gospel reading included in a carol service? How often have you seen Simeon and Anna talking to Mary portrayed on a Christmas card? Seldom if never is my experience, for their message is not quite the same ilk as the rest of the Christmas story. So what are we to understand from what Simeon says in Luke Ch2 v35. What is Simeon saying to us as he punctures all safety and comfort of our Christmas thoughts?

Simeon was religiously aware and so when he looked at the baby Jesus, he saw Him in a way rather different from how we look at Him in the crib pictured on our cards or the carols we sing. For Simeon seeing Jesus made sense of his own life and death. He saw the key to the religion which he had long been practising, and he saw in flesh the fulfilment of the commitment he had long honoured. In short, he saw the Christ child. For me the nub of this story is for us to see the Christ child in the fullness of

what He is, what He really is, not just the romantic glamour that the world dresses Him up as every Christmastide.

Simeon tells Mary that Jesus is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, that He is a sign that will be rejected and which will lay bare the thoughts of many. Simeon can see the path which Jesus will tread as He preaches His message in it's fullness. So for us in 2021, what do we take away from Candlemas. I think it is about choice. We can look at the baby Jesus in amongst the crib figures and leave the story there as we pack them away in tissue paper, or we can find in Him the key to life and death and the road on which we can share in the purposes of God, even if this route is uncomfortable from time to time. We too will be pierced by the sword, just as Simeon promised would happen to Mary. Not a great selling point to becoming a Christian.

But Simeon goes on to bless Jesus and His parents. We can know that blessing from God. This does not mean the absence of pain but the presence of God in and around us. I think we can all know the fullness of that blessing as we journey through this year together.

Andrew

Nunc Dimittis

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel.