

Sunday 1st February 2015 Candlemas
9.30am Luke 2:22-40

If we shine a torch, now I hope this is going to work.....we can see into the dark corners of the church, Christ came as a light to the world, he can see into our lives, our hearts into those places that we keep hidden. He describes himself as 'the light of the world' in John (8:12) and in Matthew (5:14) he calls us lights - 'You are the light of the world.' I'm sure you know the old Sunday School favourite: Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light, like a little candle burning in the night. In this world is darkness, so we must shine, you in your small corner and I in mine. Simeon and Anna were certainly lights of the world.

We have, and have had many Simeons and Annas ourselves. About thirty years ago I used to come and help Norkie with church cleaning. Her name was Miss Norkett but I only ever heard her called Norkie, who some of you will remember and just over there hidden behind one of our notice boards there is a statue of St. Faith, in her memory. I was always fascinated because Norkie knew all sorts of things about the church, the various memorials etc and in those days her title was God's Housekeeper isn't that a wonderful name? - I think she travelled on the bus each day and spent a number of hours here with a broom or duster in her hand.

Peter Thomas would know when a job needed doing, making a notice board to put outside so that people knew what we were doing, or a cross for us to use at Easter and when we had lots of flowers Peter was always there moving them and helping us. Peggy Sparks who was always behind the tea pot at church and other functions, when we still had parish breakfast over in the hall or the church house it was Peggy who collected the fruit buns on a Saturday morning from the Tudor Rose and warmed them - that smell was good.

I can and I'm sure that you can think of many more Anna and Simeon's and what of today well we have our church sitters - those who sit in church during the week and welcome our visitors, Jenny if not with her duster then with her jams.

Today's feast has several names. Mostly it is called Candlemas because candles are used in the service as a reminder of Simeon's recognition of Jesus as a 'light to lighten the Gentiles'. In the past, this was the day on which candles to be used in church during the coming year were blessed.

It has two other names, The Presentation of Christ in the Temple and also the Purification of St. Mary the Virgin.

These names refer to the ancient ceremonies, in the verse immediately before this morning's Gospel we read that Jesus was circumcised on the 8th day after his birth and then the **time** came for Mary's purification, and also the presentation of the first born son to God - rather like Samuel. Women were considered unclean for 40 days after the birth of a son, and 80 days after the birth of a daughter.

At the end of that time she had to bring to the Temple a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon for a sin offering. That was rather expensive so it was laid down in the law that if she could not afford the lamb she might bring another pigeon. The offering of two pigeons was called 'the offering of the poor'. It was the offering of the poor that Mary brought, another reminder that Jesus was born into an ordinary home, where there were no luxuries, where the cost of everything had to be

considered carefully.

Its interesting to note here that Luke tells us nothing about the visit of the wise men or the flight into Egypt of Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

And also how he carefully uses different age groups - the young Mary going to visit her elderly cousin Elizabeth, and then meeting with Simeon and Anna two older people.

Now picture the scene if you will, Mary, Joseph and the new baby travel to the Temple in Jerusalem, they have their sacrifice - the two pigeons. The Temple was a busy place all sorts of people would have been around including other couples with their first born child.

Simeon lived in Jerusalem, he was a righteous and devout man, it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah, God's own anointed king. He was guided by the Holy Spirit to come to the Temple and when Mary and Joseph came in with the baby Jesus - Simeon recognized them, among all those people, he recognized Jesus, he took the baby in his arms and praised God with the words that we know today as one of the churches great hymns - the Nunc Dimittis which we sing every Sunday evening at Evensong.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation
Which thou has prepared before the face of all people
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

He came to bring light to the Gentiles, that is the non Jews, that is to each one of us.

On hearing this we are told that Mary and Joseph were amazed at what was being said about their son, from the Greek the word translates a 'state of astonishment' - and its hardly surprising is it?

Then Simeon blessed them and says to Mary about the child being destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, the inner thoughts of many will be revealed and oh a sword will pierce your own soul too. More of which we will here in the next few weeks.

And then it seems as Simeon moves away - enter Anna.

We know nothing about either Simeon or Anna except what we read in these few verses, but Luke paints us a clear picture.

Anna was a widow, she was married for seven years and then her husband died, she must have known great sadness - it can make us bitter and resentful or it can make us kinder, softer, more sympathetic. Anna now an old lady of 84 has spent much of her time in the Temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer, night and day.

And straight away she began to praise God and to speak to all those who were standing about that this child being presented today was the anointed one, the one they had been waiting for, sent by God to save them.

Both Simeon and Anna had a good relationship with God, Simeon was a righteous and devout man and Anna worshipped in the Temple, she prayed with others and she prayed alone, they shone a light in the dark places.

What an example to each one of us, to worship together, to pray together and to pray alone to have a good relationship with our Father in heaven.

In August there is going to be a Passion Play in Havant Park, there has been a lot of hard work by lots of people, the road has been a bit of bumpy road but I think that we have nearly reached our journey's end. It's a project that has come from Churches Together and just recently the director has been appointed, he is the chap that among many other things has played Jesus in The Life of Christ at Wintershall - James Burke Dunsmore. Exciting times, and next Saturday if you want to find out a bit more about it or would like to be involved come along to the URC at 3pm, rehearsals start the following Saturday. We will be taking the gospel out to the people, bringing the light of Christ into the community.

As we come forward in a few minutes and hold out our hands to receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we take the light of Christ into our hearts to overcome the darkness in us and as we go out may we take that light out into our community.

Amen.