

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : February 2nd 2020  
“Candlemas”

---

**SERMON – CANDLEMAS 2020**

‘Can anyone show me what the point of it all is’? This was the startling shout from a seemingly harassed lady I heard when I was on a tube platform recently. It was a bit terrifying – but fortunately she seemed to be with family who quickly calmed her down. But she set me thinking – ‘What is the point of it all’ – and by ‘it’ I think she meant life. I have to say that any answer anyone might have tried to give her would have been firmly rebuffed – but it set me thinking how much people are still desperate to discover the true meaning of life. What is the point of it all? Who will give us the answer? Who will show us the way?

I guess many of us here would give the Christian response that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, the Life – and this is certainly something that two elderly people discovered – for today marks the end of the ‘showings’ the end of the season of Epiphany, the revealing – so our Crib will go away today, 40 days after Christmas.

Simeon and Anna are wonderful examples of the elderly faithful who have stayed spiritually flexible and alert throughout their long lives. God has told Simeon that he will see the Messiah in person before he dies, and we can imagine his excitement as on this particular day he feels drawn to go to the temple court. His trust in God is such that he will not be thrown by anything unexpected, and as soon as he sees this unremarkable little family walking in with their new baby he knows – he knows beyond all doubt that this is the child he has been waiting all his life to see. Simeon and Anna are faithfully watching and waiting with Godly living and a

hopeful heart. Typically, God nudges them to be there at exactly the right time to witness God's Son being presented in God's dwelling place, the temple.

When Simeon recognised that the moment had finally come for which he had been living, he gave his testimony in the form of a song, which we know as the Nunc Dimittis. The song begins quite personally – the sight of the baby gives Simeon his discharge and he can now die in peace. But then he uses the language of another prophet, of Isaiah – the promised deliverance is not only for Israel, but will shine out far beyond the confines of the Jewish religion as a light that will be a revelation to the pagans. The light will shine out to all the world.

This is one of the keys of the day – for we know full well the truth that unless we share our Christianity, unless we give it to others, we will lose it. Mary and Joseph selflessly offer their son to God for his service, probably very fearfully, but recognising in some way that they do not understand that their son has been chosen by God to do a special piece of work for him. Luke shows himself to be thoroughly conversant with everything that was customary under the Law for Jewish parents after the birth of a first male child and he lays great emphasis on the fact that Jesus' parents meticulously fulfilled all the legal requirements. But for many it is the significance of light, which is an important feature of today's feast.

Light is such a crucial symbol in our faith. Many of you will know the stunning religious painting by William Holman Hunt, *The Light of the World*. At its original exhibition in 1854, it was accompanied by two texts. One from Revelation 3:20: *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if anyone hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.* The other from Romans *“the night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light”*. These verses apparently inspired Hunt to create the image of Christ knocking at the door, with the door representing the heart of an individual. But as you look carefully at the painting the handle is on our side. We have to open the door on which Jesus is knocking. Jesus never comes

uninvited. He waits patiently and listens for the acceptance of God's love and grace waiting to be welcomed.

The festival is called Candlemas because this was the day that all the Church's candles for the year were blessed. Matthew records Jesus as saying: *You are the light for the entire world; a town that stands on a hill cannot be hidden. When a lamp is lit, it is not put under the meal table but on the lampstand where it gives light to everyone in the house. And you, like the lamp, must shed light amongst your fellow human beings so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.* Matthew speaks about the light which shines through our lives – that sometimes gets easily hidden or even extinguished, unless we protect it and maintain it carefully

So, a simple message for today. We all, along with that lady I saw on the tube, may at times feel overwhelmed in our daily lives – maybe, every so often, we need to straighten up, open our eyes and give thanks to God for the gift of his Son, his Son who came as the light to show us how we should live and who still leads and inspires us today, if we only have our eyes open to see it.