

St Swithun's Church Family Feast of Candlemas



**31st January 2021
10am Zoom**

**Or use this booklet to join
together with us in Spirit**

*Please use this booklet to **worship with us** on zoom at 10am – or read through this service knowing that we are joining our prayers together in Spirit.*

Create a sacred space – if possible gather a candle or lots of candles and a cross if you can find them. You could light your candles throughout the worship to represent the light we celebrate at Candlemas.

The children might like to use the Sunday school resources provided by Izzy.

In addition we will be audio recording today's sermon which will be uploaded to the website www.saintswithuns.org.uk

There are various prayer resources and other things to look at on the website – if you have any feedback or anything to share please let me know.

Giving - if you usually give your collection on a Sunday morning in cash, and you are able to, please put this aside each week to bring to church when you are next able to. Even better would be to set up your giving online ('Saint Swithun's PCC' ; 60-05-11 ; 16126718 ; NatWest Bank) if you haven't already done this.

You might like to enhance your worship by singing or listening to a hymn or a song at various points – I have a few suggestions below – you tube is a great resource...

Lord the light of your love

(play from 8.31 for our St Swithun's version)

https://www.saintswithuns.org.uk/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=250537&show_file=267373

Christ be our light <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08mqhj3>

This little light of mine

<https://uk.video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&p=bbc+songs+of+praise+this+little+light+of+mine#id=1&vid=c46c3d5114b7fe5c9f6ead838f264c2a&action=view>

Introduction

Nearly forty days ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus. Today we celebrate the day baby Jesus was presented in the Temple when he was 40 days old. In their old age Simeon and Anna recognised the importance of baby Jesus. In this worship service, we look back to the day of Jesus' birth and forward to the coming days of his passion.

The Gathering

The Greeting

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you

Prayers of preparation

In our hearts, in the lives of our families and friends, in our
Church, in our community, in our nation, in our world

Loving God: **let your light shine**

Prayers of Penitence

Jesus says, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not
walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' Let us then bring our
secret sins into his light and confess them in penitence and faith.

**Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought, in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.**

We have wounded your love, and marred your image in us.

We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins.

**For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past; and lead us out from darkness to
walk as children of light. Amen.**

The Absolution

Loving God, you welcome all who turn to you
in repentance and faith,
may God forgive us and restore us
to the light of God's presence. **Amen**

Glory to God

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to all people on earth.

Rejoice knowing that God loves us, liberates us and makes us
whole.

Today think of your favourite piece of music – something that makes
you feel full of light.



Listen to your music now.... rejoice knowing that God is with you
and brings you light.

The Liturgy of the Word

The Collect

Let us pray that we may know and share the light of Christ.

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. **Amen**

Gospel Reading *Luke 2. 22-40*

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke
Glory to you, O Lord.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.' Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you O Christ.



Sermon *Rev Frances*



In today's gospel, Luke tells us how Mary and Joseph present the baby Jesus at the Temple 40 days after his birth, to complete the necessary purification rituals after childbirth and to secure the redemption of the first-born son, according to Jewish law. Simeon, an old man who has faithfully waited many years to set eyes on the Messiah, believing that he will not die before this takes place; and Anna, a prophetess and widow who has

reached the great age of 84, both recognise in the baby Jesus the one who is to be the light of the world and the means of bringing healing and deliverance to both Israel and the rest of the world. That knowledge is sufficient for Simeon, who can now die fulfilled. His words, 'Lord, lettest now your 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' ... are familiar because they are part of the funeral liturgy.

Surely Luke's narrative touches us all: we long to be Simeon, we ache for something better, whether we call it God, paradise of

transcendence. We long for eternity's epiphany to break into human, finite time; for glimpses in our broken world of the Kingdom of Heaven. Such a desire seems more urgent than ever in this time of seemingly unrelenting struggle, as the beckoning anniversary of the Covid epidemic finds us yet again in lockdown - as we will have been for more than half of the year - hand in hand with death rates and hospital admissions which remain stubbornly high. The psalmist's words may seem written especially for us:

*How long, Lord, will you leave me forgotten,
how long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I suffer anguish in my soul,
grief in my heart day after day?*

Our gospel, though, offers us a valuable reminder that neither did Jesus come to us all-knowing and all-powerful; he didn't have the answers at the very beginning – understand the outcome, how it was going to end. The last line of our gospel tells us that after Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth, the child Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. I think that we can sometimes gain the impression that Jesus was born with full knowledge of who he was and what his was purpose on this earth – as though he lay in the cradle, just pretending to be a baby; that all the knowledge and power of God resided in him as he 'went about and lived among us'. But during his lifetime, his knowledge was incomplete. When he is dying in agony, he cries out to the God who he believes has forsaken him. That plea, like that of so many of the psalms, is that of all humanity, faced with unbearable, seemingly inexplicable suffering over which we have no control. Like us, Jesus did not experience in that moment that other hope, that parallel reality, seen in the resurrection narrative – that somehow, suffering is absorbed by love; that love overcomes death. Being fully human, he had to walk the same darkness and light that we do.

When faced with seemingly inexplicable suffering or tragedy, there seems to be a human instinct to explain; understand; predict. The alternative - that events appear to have no pattern;

no overall meaning - is more frightening to many. But in opting for the first, however understandably, we risk diminishing God. It may be more straightforward to believe that those who suffer have sinned in some way; or that catastrophes like Covid are a divine punishment. Even when bad things happen to *us*, we may harbour a belief we have somehow 'deserved' it. Perhaps this offers a measure of control - and it follows that God can subsequently be assuaged and all made well. But what does this say about our idea of God; that an all-loving creator; the one who came 'not to be served but to serve', would sanction such things; act less lovingly than we would? We can see in the biblical narrative an evolution in the human understanding of God – from a deity who favours one's own tribe and who kills men women and children who are 'the enemy', the God who advocates an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; to the God who forgives and renews those who have strayed from Him; to the God revealed in the gospels and in Paul, the God who empties himself, taking the form of a slave, whose nature is complete, self-giving love.

Our gospel relates how Mary and Joseph present an offering of two turtle doves when they take Jesus to the Temple. The usual offering was a sheep or a goat – that they did not do this shows that they were poor, as the law allowed those who couldn't afford such a sacrifice instead to give two doves. When Jesus grows up, he frees the doves from the Temple –



symbolically releasing access to God from the purity system. God can't be bought, or grace or love purchased like a possession. It is Jesus' challenge of this system of offering and purification which brings him into conflict with the religious authorities and ultimately leads to his crucifixion.

We can't know God fully in this life; or control or domesticate Him - as though access is guaranteed by putting coins in a slot machine and denied if we don't pay enough. Simeon waits a whole lifetime in hope and trust for that one encounter with Jesus - but it is 'enough'. Epiphanies; glimpses of God; a sense of overwhelming love or peace - these often arrive unexpectedly.

Perhaps part of growing spiritually is that rather than expecting certainty, we accept those fleeting understandings - or the witness of others' experiences - as 'enough'. The need to explain and reconcile truths that seem inconsistent may become somehow less important. Simeon tells Mary both that Jesus will be a source of healing and deliverance, a light that will bring revelation to all - and at the same time that she be pierced to the heart because of him. Mary's response is not to try to 'work out' what this means that moment, but to live 'in the moment' and discover in faith - as we try to do in our own lives.



Simeon waited his whole long life for a single moment of revelation. How easy is it to live in faith, hope and trust 'as if' those rare, wonderful intimations of God's kingdom are real, albeit seen as through a glass, darkly?

Can you think of something that particularly brings that reality closer to you - a place, a person, poem, bible passage, piece of music or picture? By opening ourselves to the reality of love, mercy and grace, we may find, like Simeon, that we receive them.

There's something that resonates with meaning in the implied words that, 'I just needed to see but I don't have to be there. I didn't need more.' Perhaps those words strike a chord? - or perhaps we feel very far from such an epiphany. Wherever we find ourselves, it's surely comforting to be reminded that if Jesus, the fullest disclosure of God, grew in understanding, then that gives all of us hope - and permission to grow, explore and make mistakes, as we try to become the person God intended us to be.

Amen

Affirmation of faith

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us with power from on high.
We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers

Let us pray to let God's light shine in our darkness.

As we remember the darkness of the covid pandemic in our world, our nation, our community – we pray especially for those who are dealing with loss of loved ones, loss of freedoms, loss of money, loss of fun... In the hearts of all your people,
Loving God: **let your light shine**

We pray for our church family and all those worshipping with us in Spirit – let us remember that where doors have to be closed and lights turned off and in the places we cannot go together,
Loving God: **let your light shine**

We pray for all those who work in healthcare – for Lewisham Hospital. For Frances and all those who are chaplains. For all those who are in hospital and those desperate to visit their loved ones. For those who are exhausted.
Loving God: **let your light shine**

We pray especially for those who most need our prayers and those who have asked for our prayers. For any known to us who need light to shine into their lives. For - Fran and family, Lamar, Maureen, Karen, Paulette and their families, Andy and family, Philbert and family, Catherine and Alfrina and family, Betty, Fr Richard, Martin, Rossy and family, Kevin, Gwen, Pamela, Neil, Debbie, Elaine and family, Clinton, Francis, Cynthia, Diane, Harold, Ivy, Sean, Taneisha, Talabi, Susan, Edith, Vanda, Lorna, Ena and Stephen.

Loving God: **let your light shine**

Loving God, your Christ is the one in whom faithful servants find their peace: look in mercy on the departed, who see your salvation. Carl, Gloria, Alan, Joseph, Sydney, Simone and John. Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord

And let light perpetual shine upon them

Lord God, you kept faith with Simeon and Anna and showed them the infant King. Give us grace to put all our trust in your promises, and the patience to wait for their fulfilment;

Merciful Father

**Accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

Our Father, who art in Heaven;

Hallowed be Thy name.

**Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done,
on Earth as it is in Heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil;

For Thine is the Kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. Amen.

The Peace

God has called us to live in peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The Peace of the Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The Notices

- *We will continue with online church during Lockdown.*
- *Happy Birthday to all those who have a birthday this week*



Dismissal and Blessing

The Blessing

Loving God, the springing source of everlasting light,
pour into our hearts the brilliance of your eternal splendour,
that we may light up this life with your glory,
and so that we may dispel the darkness which overshadows us
and may the light of God bless us:

Creator, Redeemer and Spirit, now and always.

Amen.

The Dismissal

Loving God, here we bring to an end our celebration
of the Saviour's birth.

**Help us, in whom the light has been born,
to live a life that has no end.**

Here we have rejoiced with faithful Simeon and Anna.

**Help us, who have found light in the temple,
to trust in your eternal promises.**

Here we bless one another in your name.

**Help us, who now go in peace,
to shine with your light in the world.**

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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