

Transcript of extract from the Taizé service on 31st January 2021 at 6:30pm
Theme: Candlemas

Reading: Matthew 2:22-32

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 Lord'), 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'.

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 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.'

Reflection by Revd. Richard Moore

We celebrate the feast of Candlemas, the hinge, or pivotal moment, in the Christian year, where the season of Christmas and Epiphany meets its endpoint and we turn to look ahead to the mysteries of Easter. Candlemas also coincides, at least this latitude, with just discernible drawing out of the winter evenings, and my family has its own tradition: at closing time on the first of February, from our shop doorway on the Warwick Road, St John's church spire should just be visible to the naked eye. The best thing, the lighting of candles, a tradition dating back to the early Church, is one such feature of this feast. With electric light available at the flick of a switch, candles are more or less either purely decorative, appreciated for their romantic glow, or liturgical, a feature of our church tradition and worship. We take electricity for granted. Yet this is quite recent. My mother recounts her memories of being evacuated from Kenilworth to stay with her grandmother in rural Oxfordshire during the Blitz. There was no electricity in the cottage. My mother's attempt to read by candlelight were thwarted by Granny, who told her not to burn the light.

Simeon had been waiting for light, not the sort from an oil lamp or candle. He was waiting for the pivotal moment when the prophecies of Isaiah would be realised. The presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple served as confirmation of Isaiah's promise to Israel. Luke introduces the elderly Simeon as righteous and pious, awaiting the consolation of Israel: consolation in the form of return and restoration, return from exile, and the restoration of Israel. Simeon's patient waiting for fulfilment of prophecy speaks of a virtuous character. It speaks of fortitude and the strength of character necessary to remain faithful, even when such perseverance seemed pointless to some people. The arrival of Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus signified the promise of the Holy Spirit fulfilled. Simeon's long wait was over.

Waiting and patience have become expected, and to many, unwelcome features of our lives this past year. We've had to display fortitude in the face of a pandemic that few of us would have predicted at Candlemas a year ago. We've been waiting, waiting for the R number to fall, for hospital admissions to fall, and for the death rate to fall, waiting for the day when schools will reopen, when business can resume, and when the most vulnerable can relax a little. Like Simeon we wait patiently, but not for prophecy, but instead for the forecast of

scientists. Our consolation will come when their predictions have been fulfilled.

Release from the grip of the pandemic will only come about if we act counter-intuitively to the normal Western response to problem-solving, if we abandon national ideas of immunisation and accept the concept of a vaccination programme that embraces the poorest and the most vulnerable, as well as the wealthiest. Salvation has been promised in the programme of mass vaccination, a solution that will only be truly effective when rolled out across the nations. Successful mass vaccination will be the pivotal moment when we stop looking back at the pandemic and start to look forward to the recovery and the rebuilding phase. There was a moment this weekend, when it looked like national self-interest was going to rule, when it was every country for themselves, until it became apparent that restoration will only come about through a spirit of cooperation. National borders may pose no barrier to coronavirus, but neither do national borders pose a barrier or impediment to the Gospel, the Good News prepared in the presence of all peoples.

The answer to the pandemic, then, can be found by patterning our lives on Jesus Christ, on the very one whom Simeon had been waiting for, one who would be, and indeed is, a light to the nations.

Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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