



Sunday, 3 February 2019 – Candlemas
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Malachi 3: 1-5 Gospel St Luke 2: 22-40
'Saved to Serve'
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

In personality I take after my father. I like to crack on with a job because I'm the sort of person who learns by doing and thinking at the same time in order to grasp the picture of what is intended to be achieved. But my mother was a more reflective person preferring to mull things over sizing up every angle before pondering what action to take. In daily living it takes all sorts to make the world; in daily faith it takes all sorts to be the Body of Christ.

In today's Gospel Simeon and Anna are the ultimate combo of reflective practice and active service. Both had waited patiently throughout their lives to see the prophecies fulfilled. In the intervening years they put the time to good use by praying, fasting and reflecting on God's promises. When the Holy Family entered the temple, they discerned in the face of the baby, the face of the Saviour of the world. After this revelation, both acted in very different ways, but act they both did, decisively.

Anna, though old was still fit and able and spurred into action spoke to anyone who would listen "This child, is the redemption of Israel!" She doubtless thought, I won't live to see it but you younger ones will live to see the day when this child becomes a man: meanwhile, hope, trust and pray for his light to shine. Simeon, by contrast, with awe and reverence, took the child in his arms and filled with the Holy Spirit spoke the most beautiful personal benediction, which we know as the Nunc Dimittis. Simeon could rest from earthly life in the knowledge that his life's work to watch and wait for the Saviour was complete. Simeon's last act before retiring from the temple and life, itself, was to bless the holy baby and his parents.

It is so important to bless people with the benefit of our faithful witness, as we will do corporately at the close of this service. Simeon's blessing was to prepare Mary and Joseph for the future. He warns that their child of light and peace would overturn the old-world order. Anyone who shines a spotlight on others' controlling actions, which suppress peoples' ability to thrive both materially and spiritually, will have a destabilising influence on the perpetrators. It's a lot for Mary and Joseph to comprehend about their son. Simeon, of course, had decades more quiet observation than Mary and Joseph and so, had the vision to observe objectively. Just as my parents had no idea what I would grow up to be, similarly here at church, we are so used to each other and these surroundings, that we might not see the possibilities: it's good, therefore, once in a while to take stock and see the potential around us.

Simeon too had taken stock and grasped the Message of the Prophet Malachi and others before him. The extract from Malachi which we heard earlier told us that God will judge by sifting out the dross from our lives like a refiner's fire, until we are able to present ourselves as a righteous offering. Malachi indicates that this is enabled by purification and active service. Here we can draw a spiritual comparison with Mary. 40 days earlier before visiting the temple, she had given birth to her baby in the stable at Bethlehem. Her faithful service to God enabled the Saviour of the world to come to his people. Then, obedient to the Jewish faith and purification rites Mary brought with her to the temple two birds for sacrificing in atonement.

In our liturgy today, our purification is enabled when we make our confession reflecting on the times, we fall short of Christ's example. Through repentance and forgiveness, we have the chance to be transformed. Of course, we need no birds of sacrifice, as in the Eucharist, we receive the symbols of Christ's body and blood, whose life paid for our sins once and for all.

After the Eucharist, today's service will conclude with a procession to the Font, the place of baptism and the place where the Holy Spirit is given to all the baptised. Like all gifts, however, the Spirit needs to be used in our lives to have benefit. Today's liturgy gives us a call to action, to go in peace and shine as the light of Christ in the world. A light that can change hearts and heal past hurts. A light that can transform minds and so, transform communities for good by drawing all to the Saviour.

40 days ago, at Christmas, as we unpacked our presents, we'll have asked each other "What did you get?" The eternal answer to that question is 'We have received a Saviour'. Here at St Andrew's, as we begin our journey towards Lent and Easter with Christ, our question and call to action is 'What can we give to serve our Saviour in return?'

Amen.