

Sermon for Sunday 1 February 2026 - United Service of Holy Trinity, Emmanuel Episcopal Church and St Germain Eglise catholique-chrétienne at Emmanuel Episcopal Church

The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)

Texts: Malachi 3.1-5; Hebrews 2.14-end & Luke 2: 22-40

I'd like to start by saying how delighted I am to be here this morning and that we are able to celebrate this great Feast of Candlemas together.

Humility and faithfulness are not rated as key virtues today. Certainly not in the current climate of national and international governance. There the exercise of power is increasingly equated to entitlement; truth is regarded as the narrative which most supports the current agenda of those in power; and commitment to agreements is only sustained for as long as those agreements meet the specific interests of those who wield most power. We are seeing the devastating consequences of this almost daily and in ways which until recently, we would have thought unimaginable.

Yet today we are celebrating a festival which has a very different message at its heart – one which both challenges what is happening in the world at present and which brings us a message of hope. For today we celebrate the arrival of God into His own temple in a way which will turn the world and its values upside down.

The Feast of Candlemas commemorates the day when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus as a new-born baby to present him to the priest in the Temple. This was to meet the requirements of the Jewish law whereby the parents of a first-born son had to come to the temple on the eighth day after his birth for blessing, to make an offering and for the purification of the mother after the birth of her child.

It is a great festival which acts as a marker between Christmas and Easter, occurring as it does, forty days after the birth of Christ. From Ash Wednesday, there are then forty days till Easter. On this day we celebrate the recognition of God's Messiah coming into the world and presented in His temple – the light and saviour of all people and this is why we mark it with the lighting of candles. Candlemas has been celebrated for over 1600 years and we have records of this from the fourth century in the Eastern church. Traditionally, people would bring their candles whether for use at church or in their homes to church on Candlemas so that they could be blessed.

Two particular qualities characterise all those who were involved with the Presentation of Jesus and these are humility and faithfulness. Today we're invited to reflect on the significance of this to glimpse what God may be saying to us and inviting us to do in the context of this festival.

Perhaps a good starting point is for us to reflect on the emotions we experience when a newborn or young baby is placed in our arms. We experience humility at this miracle of creation; this new life which is coming into the world, and the immense potential of the life which lies ahead of that child. But we also experience a call to

faithfulness; a longing to care, protect nurture this child until he or she reaches adulthood.

At Candlemas, we witness that humility and faithfulness as Mary and Joseph, faithfully fulfilling the demands of the Jewish law, come to present baby Jesus to the priest for blessing, to make their offering and for Mary's purification. They carry not only their precious son, Jesus, but also the simple offering required of those who were poor, a couple of turtle doves.

We also witness the humility and faithfulness of the old priest Simeon and the prophetess Anna. For centuries the Jewish people had hoped, often beyond hope, that the Messiah would come. They had prayed that he would come to save them from the humiliation and suffering caused by foreign occupation and to bring them salvation.

Simeon, the old priest in the temple, and Anna the prophet, were perfect representations of that hope. These holy people had waited almost their entire lives for the moment hoping and trusting God that one day the Messiah would come and that they would witness it.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon comes into the temple just as Mary and Joseph enter with Jesus. As he receives the child in his arms, he recognises with great joy, that this is indeed the one who has been promised – the Messiah. The child whom he holds in his arms is the Saviour of the world.

He also sees in a moment of revelation, that this child will bring salvation not just for him and his people but for the Gentiles also. For the light which Jesus is bringing into the world will reach out and embrace all people. Simeon blesses the child and Mary and Joseph and then praises God in the words we now as "the Nunc Dimittis"- Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. Simeon has seen God's faithful fulfilment of His promise and now he can commit himself to God in the context of eternity.

And Anna, after all her years of faithful waiting on God, is also guided by the Spirit and comes to Mary and Joseph at this moment, praising God and proclaiming that this child was the one for whom all were looking to redeem Jerusalem.

But what is most extraordinary, which we celebrate at the very heart of this festival today, is the humility of God. The prophet Malachi speaks of the Lord, the One who is Lord of heaven and earth and all that exists, suddenly coming into his temple. We imagine that He will come in a triumphant process, with great drama, attended by a myriad of angels and followers. But instead, he comes as a tiny baby, carried by and utterly reliant on his parents.

As Simeon takes and blesses Jesus, he glimpses something else as well. It is why Candlemas is often called a bittersweet festival because of its mingled message of joy and sorrow. For Simeon sees in a moment of terrible clarity and insight what the cost will be to this child who is called to be Saviour of the World and what that cost will be to those who love and follow after him. He sees ahead to the shadow of the

Cross – the path which Jesus will tread faithfully, in loving obedience to God, to bring about our salvation.

He also sees that Jesus will bring challenge and division. For this Son of God incarnate is the very source of light, truth and all goodness against whom all the powers of darkness and evil will rise up. All people including us today will be faced with a choice – whether to follow and accept him into their hearts accepting what this will entail or to reject him because the truth and life he offers is too great for us to bear.

This Feast of Candlemas is therefore one where we too face this invitation and choice. Will we, like Simeon, be willing to take Jesus in our arms? Will we let He who is our God and our Redeemer, speak to us in the very depths of our being, challenging the darkness of our sins and calling us to follow him in the life-giving journey to the Cross? Are we willing, like Anna and Simeon, Joseph and Mary, to accept the way of humility and faithfulness of our Saviour and bring these life-giving gifts to the world? Are we prepared to be lights, shining to the truth, hope and love of God in the world rather than those who, by our attitudes and actions, actually extinguish those lights?

Part of that faithfulness is our willingness to stand beside those who are vulnerable and often treated as less important in the eyes of the world. Here at Emmanuel, you have a wonderful witness to doing just that in the programmes of support and welcome which you provide for those who are refugees here in Geneva. Each one of us has the potential to use the freedom and choices we enjoy, to proclaim that every human being is of supreme value, as we are all made in the image of God and that every human being should be enabled to realise their God-given potential to achieve fullness of life and mutual flourishing.

But, as we ponder of Simeon's words of warning to Mary, we need to reflect too that if we choose to accept Christ in our arms and to be bearers of his light in the world, it will be costly for us too. We have seen already seen in the last few months, how high the cost can be for those who witness.

Yet let us draw hope and encouragement too from reflecting what we're being asked to do. For we are being asked by God to show that there is an alternative to the assumption that might equals right, that some people matter more than others and profit, power and control matter more than human flourishing and the flourishing of the natural world which sustains us. To show through what God models to us in this Candlemas Service today, that if we work together in love which is rooted in humility and faithfulness, there is a new way in which we can relate together in the world so that all may be valued and flourish.

It's just 17 days from now until the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday. Let's pray now that God will guide us during this period so that we too may accept Him in our lives and be bearers of His light and hope.

Amen

Canon Daphne Green