

In the rhythm of the church's year, we experience the movement of one season into another. Some of these transitions happen smoothly while others are pivotal moments when we change direction dramatically.

As the anticipation in Advent moved into the realisation of the incarnation and the Christmas season, so Candlemas, which we celebrate today, moves us on.

Mary and Joseph went up to the temple to make an offering in obedience to the Jewish Law, an act which reiterates for the reader Christ's humanity,

but also emphasises the devout obedience to the Jewish rites, on the part of his earthly parents.

On arrival they were met by two elderly, faithful and pious Jews. In Simeon's meeting with the infant Jesus, we look back through Israel's history and are reminded of the story of Samuel and the elderly Eli in the Temple. One significant event in the pilgrimage of God's people but it puts the events that are to follow solidly into place as part of a continuing story. A pilgrimage is by definition a moving onwards and forwards. You cannot make a journey and stay in the same place. So, while the meeting triggers a reminiscence of the past, old Simeon bids us look forward. He has lived his

whole life in expectation and longing for an event in the future and now the moment has come when he sees his longing fulfilled.

The Israelite people looked on the Temple as the place where they could meet God. Here in the Temple, Simeon recognised in the infant Jesus, the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies. At this moment The Old moves on into the New. Expectation turns to fulfilment, the glory of Israel becomes a light to the nations, and salvation is declared not just for the Jews but for all people.

But the longed-for deliverance that the Messiah brought did not take the form that the Jews expected. No triumphal victory and release from Roman domination and oppression. The road that Jesus took was a different way.

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine the stable at Bethlehem, calm and serene is Mary sitting by the manger, in which sleeps a beautiful baby, while Joseph stands watchfully by her side. The oxen quietly graze to one side, while a donkey stands at the other. A warm shaft of light comes in through an opening, but a rafter distorts its beam and as it falls by the group of figures it casts a shadow in the shape of a cross.

For forty days we have celebrated the word made flesh. This morning, we take a last look back at Christmas and the baby in the manger. But the story needs must move on and turn towards the purpose for that coming.

Simeon prophesies the fall and rise of many. His longing hope fulfilled, he speaks of the pain of a piercing sword, he foretells the fulfilment of God's longing, the redemption of humankind, the bringing back of all people to Himself.

Soon we will begin the forty days of Lent and journey with Christ to Jerusalem and the Temple, and so to the cross.

As I small child I learnt to sing choruses in Sunday school one particularly comes to mind in the context of Candlemas "See this little light of mine I'm

going to let it shine.” I was very young when I first learnt it and I got the words of the second verse wrong.

Hide it under the bush of gnome I’m going to let it shine

I’m not sure what I thought the “bush of gnome” was but nothing my mother could say would convince me that the words I should have been singing were “hide it under a bushel, No I’m going to let it shine.”

Had I been a bit more familiar at the time with the book of Common Prayer I would have known the verse in scripture, “let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven”.

As Christians we are called to live in the light of Christ who came to dispel the darkness.

St Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians said "It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" *2 Cor :6*

It is this light that we are to reflect in our lives to a world which in so many ways lives in darkness.

We are to learn to live as "children of the light and in this way we will show that "the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true"
Eph 5:9.

For those who first encountered Jesus, as for us, the symbol of light evokes the desire for truth and the thirst for the fullness of knowledge which are imprinted deep within every human being. When the light fades or vanishes altogether, we no longer see things as they really are.

Those who have experience deep depression or great personal grief, often describe it as going through a dark tunnel.

As Christians we are called not only to live in the light of Christ who came to dispel the darkness but to bring that light to others.

On Easter morning the pascal candle is lit and presented to the people with the words the “Light of Christ”.

At the end of the Baptism service a lit candle is presented to the candidate with the words “God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and has given us a place with the saints in light.

You have received the light of Christ;
walk in this light all the days of your life.”

And the congregation responds,
“Shine as a light in the world,
to the glory of God the Father.”

Another chorus I learnt as a very small child but didn't get the words wrong says this,

**“Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light
like a little candle burning in the night,
in this world of darkness so we must shine
you in your small corner and I in mine.”**