

**Fr Tim's Sermon – Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024**  
**The Feast of Candlemas**

**Hebrews 2: 14-18**

**Luke 2: 22-40**

Through the season of Christmas and Epiphany, we've heard Jesus being called many things. Messiah. Son of David. Son of God. Word made flesh. Saviour. Light of the world. Today we come to the end of the season, and having heard this morning's readings, I want us to consider two of those names given to Jesus.

In our first reading from the letter to the Hebrews, we heard about Jesus as Saviour, destroying the one who has the power of death and freeing those who were held in slavery. And in our Gospel reading we hear about Jesus as the light of the world. Or more specifically, in the words of Simeon, the light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel.

It's no accident that these two readings, and these two names for Jesus come together today. Jesus as light of the world is revealed through his nativity and epiphany, and Jesus as saviour is revealed through his death and resurrection. And today those things come together. Today the season of Christmas and Epiphany comes to an end. Today we will put the crib back into storage until we are ready to celebrate the nativity again next year.

And as we leave this season behind us, we begin the journey that takes us into Lent, Passiontide and Easter. In the words that we will say in our final responsory at the end of today's service, we turn from Christ's birth to his passion. But there's more to it than that. There's more to it than just turning our attention from the Brussel Sprouts of Christmas to the Chocolate Eggs of Easter. To get under the skin of what it means to turn from the crib to the cross, it helps to consider these two names of Jesus.

We heard in our Gospel reading, Jesus being brought to Jerusalem, forty days after his birth for the rite of purification as was required by the law. And while they were in the temple in Jerusalem, Mary, Joseph and Jesus met Simeon, the righteous and devout man who was looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and on whom the Holy Spirit rested.

In one sense, Simeon had everything to lose in this encounter. He had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not taste death until he had seen the Messiah. Having seen Jesus, his life could come to an end. Having recognised the baby in his arms, he had nothing more to live for.

But instead of resentment, Simeon was guided by the Spirit, as he took Jesus in his arms, did what was required by the law, and then praised God in that wonderful song of praise that we heard. It was in this song that the message of the angels, the magi, John the Baptist, and all who we've travelled through Christmas and Epiphany with was completed and made whole.

Simeon gave his life up to God, a life that was made complete by holding Jesus in his arms. And he went on to identify Jesus as the light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel. This was the point at which the fullness of Jesus' future was revealed to his Mother as she stood and listened. Not simply the Messiah, come to save the Jews from Roman rule, but the light for the Gentiles as well. Perhaps that's what has been missing in the revelation, the Epiphany, so far.

Jesus' message of love and inclusivity begins here, spoken by the prophet, and still said or sung in churches every day at Evening Prayer or Compline. But we're not there yet. Simeon goes even further. He addresses Mary directly and tells her that this child is destined for the falling and rising of many, and that he will be opposed.

And we still see this in the world today. People grow in their relationships with Jesus. People fall from their relationships with Jesus. People persecute those who have faith in Jesus. But for all who turn to Jesus and have that faith, he is their light and salvation. Jesus – light of the world. Jesus – saviour.

This symbol of light is one that's used in many situations, and has been ever since. As we come to the end of our service today, we will all light candles as we commit ourselves to turning from Christ's birth to his passion. As our liturgy is led from the font, we will be in the shadow of the first symbol of Jesus' new life in his resurrection, the Paschal candle, the new light, lit at the Easter Vigil last year.

Behind me a light burns constantly to symbolise that Jesus' body is reserved, the communion bread in which we share, reserved for the sick and dying, sharing this same symbol of light. Through this light, Jesus is revealed to the Gentiles, the glory of Israel, the light of the world.

But today we begin a new journey with this light. We turn from Christ's birth to his passion. We begin to prepare to share in what it means for that light to be put out on Good Friday, in readiness to share in the Easter Joy of the light that stays lit for ever.

And in doing this, we bring in the second name of Jesus. Jesus as Saviour. Everything I've said so far makes a certain amount of sense. Even to those who don't believe, they will recognise the symbolism and understand why it matters to those of us who do.

But Jesus as Saviour is a harder concept. The obvious question is: *what exactly does Jesus save us from?*

For someone who's not a believer, it's not illogical to ask why Jesus doesn't save us from suffering, from dying, from hunger, from the pain of losing friends and family. I say this because this is exactly the conversation starter I was offered by someone I spoke to this week, whose mother had died, and who was very angry with Jesus. And it's a good question.

Jesus during his ministry did save people from these things. He healed the sick, he fed the hungry, and he brought friends and family back to life. And so it's difficult when someone is angry because Jesus doesn't bring their mother back from the dead.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews makes it very clear what we are being saved from in the passage we heard this morning. Jesus was made man, shared in our existence, so that he could save us from the enemy who he overcame on the cross. The enemy of sin, death and the devil.

During his time on earth, Jesus healed our symptoms and infirmities. Through his cross and resurrection, he is ready to save from within. During his time on earth, people were drawn to Jesus because he could heal them, people followed him because he inspired them, people loved him because he loved them. Through his cross and resurrection, he heals, inspires and loves not our physical selves, but our very beings.

He sees us far deeper than as flesh and bones, and is ready to discard those and bring us back to himself as pure and holy. On the cross, Jesus pays the price for all sin. If we come to him in true repentance, we will be forgiven because of the cross. In his resurrection, Jesus overcomes death, showing that it is not the end, and that there is life after death. And in his birth, ministry, life, death and resurrection, he exposes the devil. He speaks about the power of the evil one, he warns about the trials, he overcomes temptation, and he gives us an alternative.

We are saved from sin, death and the devil because Jesus is our light. It's not a foregone conclusion, he is also destined to see many rise and fall, but for those who carry his light into the world, he is that light.

As we turn today from Christ's birth to his passion, we do so in the light of Jesus Christ, who on the cross makes the sacrifice that gives us confidence to be here and to turn to him and with him.

Jesus – light of the world. Jesus – Saviour

Let us turn from the crib to the cross, from Christ's birth to his passion, and let us pray that we may walk in the light of Christ, who loves, cares, protects, and saves us.