

Sermon for Sunday 1 February 2026 6.00pm – Margaret Maybury

Malachi 3.1-5; Psalm 24; Hebrews 2.14-18; Luke 2.22-40

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable in God's sight. Amen.
Please sit.

Good morning to you all. Candlemas. Symbols. We have many symbols in our lives. Today, if we look around the church, we can see the emergency exit signs showing us the way in emergencies - just over there. Who cannot forget the entertaining and brain-stretching Church Symbol quiz Kevin kindly devised for us at Christmas - he's around the back here. Those wonderful photos of images taken at strange angles. Who still looks at the nave lights and thinks, I wish I had taken note of the shape they are designed in. They were part of Kevin's quiz. Then we think of symbols within the church fabric, the De Vere stars on the tower, the boar or terrace and of course, the sheep, the symbol of our ancestors wealth, all on the walls. We hear today in the gospel reading from Luke, symbolism of God at its height. Luke 2.22-40 is full of symbols. Obedience, succession, promise, faith, to name but a few, there are lots.

Obedience is the first step of symbolism we meet. Joseph travelled with his family to submit to Jewish laws. The purification of Mary, 40 days after giving birth, echoes other prescriptive instructions from God. Forty is a name often repeated in the Bible. Think of the Ark and the Great Flood in Genesis 7.12. The rain fell on the Earth for 40 days and 40 nights. Jesus was in the wilderness later on, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil, Luke 4.2. Joseph and Mary took their first male child to be to be presented in the temple, 40 days after his birth, where mystery, doubt, succession, hope, and faith unravels in all its glory.

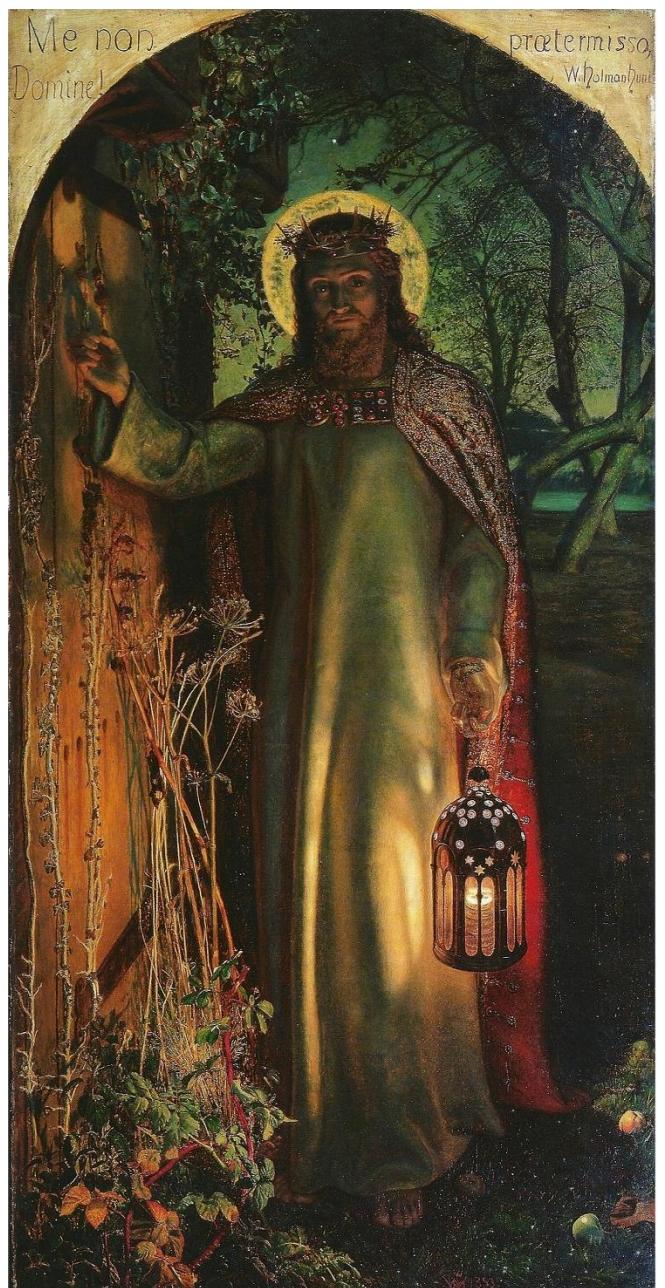
The portrayal of succession is in the welcome and joy of Simeon. Simeon recognises the child Jesus as God's promise. Faith appears with Anna, its roots deeply embedded in her life and her heritage, as her father was named Phanuel, after one of the four Archangels who was responsible for repentance and hope. More symbolism. The joy and welcome words of the two elders bring mystery and doubts into the hearts and minds of Mary and Joseph, as Simeon and Anna give voice to the promise of a saviour, the peace of redemption, and the hope of humankind's eternal life of peace with God.

The building blocks for the forward life of Jesus through God's symbolism have been laid. However, the biggest message for us is that of light, hidden but clear in verse 32, as Simeon speaks of a light for revelation to the Gentiles in his spoken prayer, which is now our Nunc Dimittis. However, the light is not focused entirely on Jesus. It also shines on the other characters in this passage, with the equality of human worth at whatever age at the forefront.

We have the child or baby of 40 days or not quite six weeks old. We have the parents, a young couple, and lastly, two people in the winter of their years, Simeon and Anna. The message across the stage of the Bible here is that all lives are valued across all age groups. Would this not be good if all human life remembered this? The older characters, Simeon and Anna, have perseverance and vision to follow their faith. Wisdom of older age is shown to us in a very reflective way, which is a lesson for us all. Wisdom of older generations can teach, guide and inspire our younger generations.

Time for local comment - here in Lavenham, we have the oldest demographic within the district. What a wonderful gift this is. We embrace our community and thank God for it. Our older generation has much to give us all, in particular for our younger generations. However, as the joy of Simeon in verse 28 and the joy of Anna in verse 38 welcomes Jesus, they celebrate the child as the promise from God, spoken of in our first lesson today in Malachi 3.1. In our church, who cannot fail to smile when children join us? Their innocence, their laughter, their joy whilst playing with our new toys, their little footsteps dropping upon our hard church floors, echoing around the building. They bring us so much hope for the future. The sound of their chattering proclaims the future life of our church. I wonder if Jesus was quiet during his presentation at the temple? What do you think?

As you all probably know, I enjoy art, hence you've got a little picture today. I am not so much a critic, but I am someone who knows what they like. Religious art, with all its symbolism, entrals me. I speak of this to ask you to look at the representation of William Holman Hunt, *The Light of the World* that you have been given with the pewsheet this morning. I hope you can all see a copy, and I do hope you will take it home with you. Jesus is portrayed as the keeper of the gate at dawn. The viewer is invited in towards the lantern light to follow a slightly illuminated path, the path to faith. Jesus is more in shadow, a supporter of



all who follow the path. Look at the colours. These can be the symbolism of Luke's gospel at Chapter 4, each colour representing the symbolism we have looked at earlier. It is said William Holman Hunt struggled to represent Christ at Dawn. If this is correct, the struggles for Nicodemus within the Gospel of John, chapter 3 verse 2, where he came to Jesus by night, is reflected in the painting.

Do you struggle to enter the path of God? How can we help you? Simeon recognised light as important in Jesus's life. Light has been at his birth. Annually, we recall the shepherds being visited by the angels in a vision of light. The Magi follow the bright star, and our re-enacting of the nativity scene usually has light flooding out from it. How many of you here have enjoyed that wonderfully poignant but comical Christmas film, *Nativity*? Don't be shy, it must bring a smile to your face. Do you recall the scene with the shining halo, star-faced angels on the steps and the Archangel Gabriel moving onto the stage whilst riding the moon, all in wonderfully bright light. The symbolism of light coming through darkness with the message of the good news of Jesus's birth is wonderfully portrayed. If you haven't seen that film, you need to see it at some stage.

Later in our service today, we will celebrate the lighting of candles to lighten our path of faith for whatever age we may be. Simeon proclaimed Jesus as a light, and we celebrate this fact annually centuries later. The symbolism of Luke's passage heard today has been recognised. We have tried to look at it. We have acknowledged the characters on the stage within the words of the Bible.

We have seen their importance. But the biggest message for us is the message of the Christ light, which shines on everyone, on every age group, everywhere. His salvation shines on for all. One message I hope we will all take away with us is that the path of God is illuminated at whatever age for all throughout the life of Christ. He holds the lantern ready to light the path. He stands as the gatekeeper for all age groups. All age groups matter to God. Our older generations can teach, inspire, and guide the younger generations, and in turn, the younger generations are our hope for the future. They will in turn carry the light of Christ for us. They will be our Candlemas. They will share our faith journey into the future years. Amen.