

Sermon for Sunday 1 February 2026 6.00pm – John Carter

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

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts bring you glory, O God, and be for the healing of your creation. You may be seated.

I'm inviting you to join me on a journey, a journey about Candlemas. Now, my first instinct when I heard about this theme was not just simply, 'What does it say about Jesus?' or 'What is it theologically?', but 'Why? Why do we do it?' So I went to my bookshelves. Ashley can tell you I have a lot of them. I looked at my few books on liturgy and the history of worship and didn't really find a reference to Candlemas. So I pestered Simon for a while. What does it mean? Why? Eventually, I even looked on the internet and I heard, and I did actually see it, Candlemas is actually a Swedish rock band, probably heavy metal. They're good at that. But that didn't really help me either. So I went to other places and finally went back to my books and just read the sections on Epiphany and Christmas and that, and in the back, not noted in the index of the books, they did mention Candlemas. So I did find a little more about it.

I read the text, I studied the text, I pondered them, I shook my head at them. But I did start pulling together some thoughts, and I'm inviting you to hear them. The first thing I did was come up with a haiku.

Candlemas. Time of transition. God's child. A reforming fire. Life becoming light.

One of the things I learned throughout my years of seminary and study on formal liturgy, I coming from a very low liturgical background, was how our forms of worship can provide for us a deep connexion, how liturgy, the work of the community, that is all of us, links us to our own human psychology as individuals and as a community. It also links us to a joint and individual spirituality. Liturgy is not focused on whether who has control or power or even that we absolutely obey it. Worship acts in that moment. It acts to move us toward the ways we can connect with one another and with our God, where we reflect upon life, and through our acts of ritual reflection, through our expressions, we can mark these moments, important or not. Events of our lives, the movement of our living.

We find that in our time of reflection, we begin to recognise those significant times for who we, as individuals and as a community, are, and are becoming. Ritual moves us to see a refresh those connections, to see our sense of belonging, and, importantly, allow us to acknowledge that there is something far greater than our self, a sense that calls us to experience the totalness of life, its goodness, and its challenges. We are being called into life. We are being

called to become a light to the world. As the Prophet Micah reminds us that God is calling us to act for justice, to love out of mercy, and to walk this good gift of God's physical blessing, our world, to walk in humility with God, who is the source of all blessing.

Now, liturgically, Candlemas is the final exploration of the various narratives about Jesus, the human child. In these narratives, we experience the whole exploration of human life. As seen through a Palestinian Jewish boy, he grows into ministry, a ministry that God calls him to. We meet the prenatal Jesus in the various pre-birth annunciations, both to Mary and to Joseph. We meet the infant Jesus in the Christmas narratives around his birth and even in the darkness of the murder of the children of Bethlehem.

We see Jesus's faithfulness to God through the acts of worship of which he is a part of. Today is one of those days. Jesus may not really know what's going on, but it starts him on a life of devotion. We see it again when Jesus, as a young early teen, winds up debating with the elders in the temple when they visited the temple at that time. If you look at how Jewish spirituality goes, it would have been his bar mitzvah. If he was female, it would have been a bat mitzvah. We see Jesus answering God's call to live the ministry he was sent to live, when he willingly went under the water at his baptism.

If we observe Jesus closely, we start to recognise our own path of faith, the way that we have been following Jesus in our lives. In observing of him, we see similarities of our own experiences, such as when we were children, we were presented to the church, be it through baptism or christening, or as I experienced, as a dedication ceremony in front of my parents' church. In all of these points, we also become the people who are celebrating this. Because when we meet a child at baptism, we are not just meeting a child, we are supporting that child's family, the new parents. We are celebrating with them a gift of life, a gift of love, whether it's the first or second or third or more child.

We also find during Candlemas a time for us to begin to reflect on light. What does that mean for us? Light is important in natural ways of vitality and growth and in the metaphorical ways of telling us who God is and how God acts in life, in our living. These are deep meanings which undergird what we do in our rituals of blessing. Light and fire are important. As humans, we developed around the campfires. We need sunlight to be able to live and thrive. The campfires of our early human ancestors not only warmed us in the darkness and in the winters, but they also began to bring us together. We see in the campfires the ways that we develop compassion, community, conversation, and communication. All of these grew around the campfire. Light and fire are important, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

We can see these truth in the readings that we've heard today, whether this morning or this evening. The texts that talk about what God is calling us to and what God called Jesus to. In the teachings of the Prophet Malachi, as well as in one of the Psalms by the Psalmist, we hear that God is a Holy refining fire, not one that condemns or destroys, but one that purifies us and brings us closer. In that, we find ourselves faced with the most awe-filled experience. Love. God's deep passionate love. God's own heart. This relational God makes it even clearer for us in the reading from Hebrews, where we are confronted with God's presence among us in the one we name Emmanuel, that is God with us. In that, God shows a mystery of embodiment of being together with us. We sense that God is one with us. And we see this in Jesus, the Son of Mary. And in seeing, we are called to grapple with that mystery. And in our grappling, we are called to open ourselves to the presence of God. We are called to become the fullness of God on earth.

Our gospel lesson invites us to respond to God's great blessings with our own ways of heart-filled devotion and praise. In the examples of Simeon and Anna, we see this pattern of daily devotion, where they have demonstrated to us the way of God. We see it in the temple court when they meet the Holy Family. We see how they expected, long expected, and yet didn't really. And when that moment came, it led to greater faith and praise. It is in their lives a faith-filled and faithful devotion and practise that we meet, that we, too, can experience that moment of insight, that blessing of God, which breaks in in the unexpected and expected moments. And it continues to move throughout all of our seasons of life. In our celebrations of Candlemas, we are invited to see the examples of our forebears of faith, the prophets, the poets, the priests, the anchorites, the laity, how they met that fiery divine breath of God in their daily walk, how they responded, and how this moved them to greater depth of faith.

Candlemas is a time of transition. We are moving from the considerations of Christmas to beginning the considerations of the passion and of Easter. Today, we bless candles. If we listen closely to God's spirit, we find that when we bless things, we are in turn being blessed. We may not recognise it, may not be in the way we like, but it is happening. And we become a blessing for each other, both in life and faith. And we find at those moments of blessing, we are also being fitted to be and become God's source of light with everyone we meet on a daily basis.

And so at this moment, we once again are meeting God, who is asking of us, Will you follow me? Will you be a blessing? Do you love? How can we respond to such an invitation? May we always choose to follow, and may we always choose to love. Amen.