

St Brandon's 10.15am Candlemas 28.01.24

Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

As I said earlier, today we celebrate Candlemas, which falls this week, on 2nd February. It was traditionally the point early in the year at which the old church candles were discarded and the new supply of church candles was blessed, and it's also the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple: our gospel reading for today.

Yesterday I was with hundreds of others at the cathedral – our local temple really. We were bidding farewell to our Bishop Paul and Rosemary, with a wonderful range of music, readings, prayers and notably, several children and young people taking part. We thank God for the way Bishop Paul has led us, through his ministry as bishop here over the past 10 years, with Jesus always at the centre.

And that takes us right back to Simeon and Anna in the temple, who met Jesus as a baby and recognised in him the Saviour they had awaited for so long. We usually remember Simeon's words as the Nunc Dimittis, sung in Evensong, but did you also notice what Simeon said to Mary?

This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

This year, when we move from Candlemas to Lent in less than 3 weeks, the sense of Jesus' destiny is particularly strong. The mention of the sword which will pierce Mary's soul catapults us forward to the cross, where she who cradled her newborn son watches him die in agony. As we approach Lent in the next few weeks, let us not shrink from the truth that Jesus came to give his life to rescue us from sin and

death: in this Communion service we will remember that life-giving sacrifice as we share the symbols of his body and blood, given for us.

The only ones who recognised who Jesus was were two older people, people who are often marginalised or overlooked. But crucially they were people who prayed, waited and watched, who expected God to keep his promise – as psalm 27 says

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Anna can sometimes be written off as a poor old woman – lacking in power and status, but as we know, what older people may now lack in economic or physical strength, they more than make up for in humour, life experience and wisdom- I see a few heads nodding at the back!

So for the rest of this sermon, I bring you a reading by Trevor Dennis about Anna- which struck me for obvious reasons as her namesake, but also for the insight it gives into her deep and radical faith.

The author imagines Anna meeting her nephew, shortly after Jesus has come into the temple with his parents.

(If you'd like to read the piece which followed, please see

Imagining God Trevor Dennis pub. SPCK 1987)