

Now may I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is 41 days since Christmas. I know that not because I'm counting or counting down to next Christmas but, I know that yesterday was the feast of the presentation or Candlemas as it's sometimes called and that's always 40 days after Christmas. And that's what we're celebrating today and it's a good feast I think to remember for several reasons. One, is that it marks the transition, the movement between Christmas and Easter and it always comes in the middle thereabouts of that timeframe. And also it introduces us to the character of Simeon who makes a great impact here in the beginning of Luke and then disappears. He's never heard of before, doesn't appear after. This is the only time we hear anything of this character Simeon.

But, before saying something about Simeon I just should mention, well I want to mention, that this whole story evokes powerful memories for me for a couple of reasons. One I'll mention later, the first one I'll just say now is that the festival of Candlemas was always the best service in my college chapel. It was always the highlight of our liturgical year, which the service used to be in darkness and we used to pass a candle round whilst we sang my favorite hymn, which I'm absolutely delighted Alex has put on the agenda for today. So, we're singing later my favorite hymn, Lead Kindly Light which was written by Cardinal Newman who was an alum of our college.

So, Candlemas to me brings back very special and powerful memories of my halcyon days. Anyway, back to Simeon. Did you notice that when Simeon appears there are three references to the Holy Spirit? We're told the Holy Spirit rests on Simeon, we're told the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he'd seen the messiah and then it says that the spirit guides Simeon to the temple. So, three verses, three references to the Holy Spirit.

So, there's something special and important happening here but, look what it is that happens. It

all takes place in the temple and Simeon takes this baby in his arms and prays a prayer of blessing while his parents stand close by. There's nothing particularly spectacular about it. The temple that day would have been full of people and I reckon only a few would have noticed this old man praying with a baby and his parents. It wouldn't have looked out of the ordinary or anything to be particularly aware of. I reckon that the people in that temple that day would be amazed that here we are, 2000 years later talking about what was going on in the corner of the temple that day. And there's something about that which is not uncommon in my experience.

The Spirit can move amongst us powerfully without a fuss. Yes there can be dramatic encounters with the Spirit and His revelation but, more often than not that's not the case. There's no drama. Which leads me to mention something that we do in the chapel every week during communion as we distribute the bread and the wine and you'll have noticed if you've been before that whichever priest isn't celebrating is in the chapel and that's because Mother Rebecca and I both love to be there to pray with people and we keep it simple. We ask the Holy Spirit, this is all we do, we ask the Holy Spirit to work in whatever situation the person who comes for prayer wants God to work. It's not dramatic but, I hope that there might be what we could call a Simeon effect. We've heard that the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon and that's my prayer for what we can offer in the chapel. That the Spirit comes to rest on those who come to pray.

Well let's move on to what Simeon says. Simeon takes the baby Jesus who he's holding in his arms and he names the baby "a light for revelation to the gentiles" or nations as other translations say. And of course he's not alone in naming Jesus as the light. John's gospel begins with St. John calling Jesus the light of all people. Jesus himself says, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but, will have the light of life." Light reveals. We all know that dreadful experience of being stuck in a dark room, not

seeing the way out, bumping into things that we can't see but, when the lights go on things become clear. We can see a way forward. The coming of Jesus is God making himself known to light up the world and to show us the way. That's what we celebrate in this season of Epiphany which means, the word Epiphany means, to reveal, to make manifest. We celebrate in the season that God came as one of us or as the writer of our epistle says today, "like us in every respect."

God came like us in every respect to reveal himself to the world, to make himself known. The revelation of God is for all people which is why we begin the season of Epiphany by remembering the wise men who came to see Jesus. The wise men who were gentiles, who traveled from a far nation to worship the Messiah, symbols of the fact that God came in Christ for all people, not just the people of the old covenant. So light reveals, it also exposes. Simeon recognizes this too, he says to Mary, "this child is destined for the falling and 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."

So, we see here Simeon bridging the gap between Christmas and Easter while holding the baby Jesus in his arms he points forward to the bitterness and pain of the cross. He acknowledges that the coming of Jesus both exposes the sin that lurks within each of us and also deals with it. That it identifies the darkness and he shows that darkness can be driven away by the light of Christ. When we come into the light of Christ we can dare to examine ourselves in honesty, to see the failings that have been within us that we all have, safe in the confidence that Jesus on the cross has acted to take away those failings and that sin.

And lastly I want to mention Simeon's great sense of fulfillment. He says this, "master now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your word for mine eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon we're told was righteous and devout. He was looking forward to the

consolation of Israel. He was waiting expectantly for the coming of the Messiah which he saw promised in the Old Testament, just as it was promised in that reading from Malachi that we heard. And the Holy Spirit opens Simeon's eyes to recognize in Jesus the one long promised, he saw Jesus and was at peace. And what strikes me about this is that the mere sight of the baby Jesus was enough for Simeon. If it was me I'm sure I'd of said something like, oh God just let me see him grow up. I've waited all this time for the Messiah, just let me see what happens when He's an adult but, no, Simeon is content. He doesn't need or want to see anymore.

As Newman says in the great hymn we'll be singing later, "the distance seen I do not wish to see, one step enough for me." Simeon has seen enough, enough to know that the promise of God has been fulfilled. Now he can go in peace.

What is enough for us? How much of God do we need to see and experience before we find peace? What counts for us as fulfillment? What would we have to do or experience to find the fulfillment and the peace which Simeon found as he held the baby Jesus?

And before I close I should declare the other reason why this passage is so special for me, and that's because as many of you know my father died when he was young and still rector of a big and lively parish and we had part of this reading, the bit that's known as the Nunc Dimittus, the song of Simeon that begins, "Master lettest now your servant depart in peace." We had that at his funeral. So it carries a particular resonance for me. It speaks of fulfillment, of work being done of completeness, of something being enough even if it's not everything, of hope in the midst of sadness.

So, three things we see in this passage about Simeon. We see the Spirit was at work in him. That he identified Jesus as the light, and also the challenge Simeon leaves us with in finding that peace which only God can bring.

Amen.