

Reflection on Candlemas 2021 by Revd Sue Strutt

We think of Epiphany as a time when Jesus was discovered by the world when the three Kings, or Wise Men, came from foreign lands and visited the holy family in the stable where Jesus was born. It became known far and wide that a new king had been born. Candlemas, however, is the time when Jesus is taken out into the world. The quietness and holiness of the birth in the stable is left behind in order to fulfil the customary law of purification and dedication before going home.

On their journey home to Nazareth, Joseph and Mary stopped at the Temple in Jerusalem for the purification. This would have been a similar event for any baby born to a Jewish family at that time, and the custom continues to this day. Once home, Jesus lived the life of a son as in any household. He would have been taught the rituals and laws of the Jewish faith, and we hear that "he grew to be strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). He certainly needed his strength and wisdom to face the tumultuous world into which he was born, and to fulfil the course of life to which God had called him.

So, what was different for Jesus in the Temple?

Simeon and Anna, two elderly people in the Temple, who had given their lives to God, recognised that here was the Saviour of the world (their world at least) for whom they had been longing. They both praised God, but Simeon went one step further and warned Joseph and Mary that their son would be at the centre of great controversy, causing people to take sides in future conflict. He also warned Mary of the pain she would feel as her son took this course of life.

We know what happened later, but what does all this mean for us today? Because as far as we can see, the world has not been saved. There are still wars, genocide, torture, disease, poverty, and wrongdoing of all kinds. Worse than that, though, these things do not happen on their own. People - leaders, military, and politicians - are causing them to happen, sometimes in the name of religion. So, we might ask, what use is it knowing that Jesus is our Saviour? Let's consider.....

Candlemas (February 2nd) is a time when we look back at the events of Christmas and Epiphany. 2020 was a Christmas like no other. You don't need me to spell it out to you; a dark cloud has hung over the world for an entire year. Remember, Simeon foretold times of darkness when he talked about the "rise and fall of many". We have lived through the worst year most of us can remember, and people have certainly argued with each other, the "inner thoughts of many" (Luke 2:35) have been revealed; love and hatred on opposite sides.

But - Candlemas is also a time when we look forward to better times, when the Light of the World is given to us at Easter. The feast is well placed at the beginning of February as we begin to come out of a dark winter and look towards the brighter Spring.

