

Sunday 31 January 2021 - The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)

Sermon Notes

The Presentation - Background

- An important celebration in the Church, bringing Luke's account of the birth of Jesus to a close (Luke 2:22-38)
- In medieval times it was celebrated with processions around the church and parish accompanied with many candles (hence Candlemas)
- Now falls on the Sunday closest to 2 February (40 days after Christmas)
- In Israel 40 days after the birth of a first son the parents had to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice and for the mother to be 'purified'
- Luke emphasises continuity with the Old Testament both by Joseph and Mary's observance of the Law's requirement and by their encounter with Simeon and Anna, with their prophetic pronouncements (though we only hear Simeon's)
- Simeon talks about Jesus' future - a light to the Gentiles, the glory of Israel - that is, the Saviour of the whole world
- He also has a private message for Mary - she will suffer with her son
- Beyond these theological points, Luke's account has something to say to us during the current pandemic, as we'll see later. But before that ...

A worrying pandemic-inspired fallacy

- The proposition, in a recent debate, that *NOT ALL LIVES HAVE EQUAL VALUE*
- If this can ever be true, it can only be so in economic terms
- And economic terms are precisely what Jesus often taught against
- For example, remember the amazement of the disciples when Jesus told them how hard it was for the rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven (Mark 10:23-26)
- Or how he commended the widow who put two pennies, all she had to live on, into the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44)
- More generally God blesses those whom the world treats as of little account (the meek, those who mourn, peacemakers etc) (Matthew 5:3-10)
- Economic value has no place in Jesus' scale of values for God's kingdom
- We can now return to the Presentation

How the cast-list of the Presentation shines a light onto another aspect of our society highlighted by the pandemic

- Who was there? Jesus - 40 days old; Mary - a very young woman; Joseph - an older man (probably); Simeon and Anna - both very old
- At least 3, possibly 4, generations - and the account would have been incomplete without any of them
- In this area most people live in one generational households, two if they are bringing up children
- But the historical pattern and that in many other modern societies is for several generations to live together, the most able looking after the least

- Here is a different scale of value - not measured in money but in humanity
- And think of how much true value is added to our communities by those who voluntarily care for others
- We might call all of this 'community value' - a world away from economic value - something we as Christians we should fight to recognise

Rationing health care provision

- What do doctors and nurses fear most about the pandemic? That the NHS will be overwhelmed and they will be forced to prioritise who should be treated
- It is hard enough for them to see patients dying from Covid, often alone and scared, but having to hasten the death of some to preserve others is asking them to take on too much responsibility
- It is good that they, and probably most of us, would see this not only as a failure, but also as opening up an unacceptable fault-line in our society, since there is no adequate basis for making such life and death judgements, certainly not economic value

The Presentation - a final thought

- Simeon predicted that Jesus would be a light to lighten the Gentiles - two thousand years later billions of people around the world have seen that light; it remains our responsibility to 'shine as lights in the world to the glory of God the Father' and to speak truth in our own time