

St Marc, Grenoble

Sunday 30th January 2022

Epiphany 4; Presentation of Christ: Candlemas, Festival of Lights, 5th before Lent

1 Cor 13: 1 - 13

Luke 2: 21 - 40

'Salvation'

Good Morning to everyone, those here and those joining on Zoom
- it is really good to be back HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

Can anyone tell me which day in the Church's calendar we're celebrating today? Epiphany 4, Last Sunday of Epiphany, Presentation of Christ (actually Weds. 2nd Feb), The Purification of Mary, Candlemas, festival of Lights and 5th Sunday before Lent!

(The purification of a woman after childbirth, was celebrated 40 days after the birth of a child, and I was interested to learn recently that some people in Nigeria still practise that ritual).

It is always a challenge knowing which Sunday to celebrate, not that it matters too much, because the overarching message of the Gospel remains the same!

But, the last possibility is scary, because it makes me realise we are already thinking ahead towards Easter, and all that means. (certainly in UK Easter Eggs are usually on sale the week after Christmas!)

What particularly struck you about today's reading? What impacted you about it?? Or, was there anything that gave you a slightly different view of this familiar story?

It seems, even now, that nearly the whole world is happy to celebrate the birth of the Christ child at Christmas - even if they have no idea who He really is, or what His birth may or could mean to them in the days ahead!

Whenever a new baby is born, and a new life comes into the world, there is - even if only for a short while - a ray of hope in that life. Fortunately, these days, for most of us in the Western world, the delight in the birth of a new child continues a little longer.

There are two events in my life that I will never forget, as long as I live. The first was being present at the birth of my daughter, and witnessing, for the first time, the miracle of a new life being born.

The second, possibly even more momentous, was the experience of taking my

daughter - who at that time was just three years old (she's now nearly forty nine!) - to meet her new baby brother for the first time.

The sheer joy and delight of that event - experienced through her eyes, was a uniquely exquisite moment.

Later, as a family, we realised that this delightful little boy was going to dramatically change the dynamics of our family. For example, from the day we brought him home from the hospital, we didn't have a single complete night's sleep for the next three years!

Jesus' Birth also caused great joy and delight, but not only to His humble human family. His birth was announced by a supernatural proclamation - but, to whom was the proclamation made?

Well, first, the angels made the announcement to the most marginal people - shepherds.

In those days, shepherds were really considered outcasts by society, not considered trustworthy - they were not even allowed to testify in a court of law. Yet the message of Salvation for all mankind was given first to them.

It is interesting, isn't it, Moses was a shepherd, King David was a shepherd and Jesus often described himself as a shepherd.

There was also a supernatural announcement to foreign, Gentile nobility - Magi, Astrologers, 'Wise Men' or Kings. The proclamation to them used a different method, which they would readily take notice of - a star'.

Whoever the announcement was made to, and however it was made, the message of Salvation was the same! And, that message changed human history once and for all. But, what did it all mean?

A friend of mine told a story, which I found very helpful:

On the maiden voyage of the great ship the 'Titanic' in April 1912, there were 2223 people of different classes on board: Nobility and aristocracy in the best suites, well off and business people in the cabins, quite poor people in steerage and, of course, the crew who had least comfort of all.

But, when disaster occurred, and the ship struck an iceberg and sank, on 15th April, a few hours later, outside White Star Line's offices a list was posted. On that list there were only two classes of people: 'Lost' and 'Saved'.

On the last day, if there is to be a list, I suspect it will have those same two headings - Our biggest concern should not be what social status, or what

privileges we have, but in which class we are going to be classified on that final list!

Jesus was born on Earth to bring the chance of salvation to everyone. All we have to do is to believe. - Which class will you be listed in?

You see, unlike the unfortunate folk on the Titanic, the choice is yours, and yours alone - will you be 'Lost', or will you be 'Saved'??

Father God's only Son, Jesus, became a human child; and, there is absolutely no doubt that he changed Mary and Joseph's family dynamics.

After the natural, and the supernatural, joy of his birth, there were some stark realities to be faced; some of which were very harsh.

For example, very early in His life, Jesus and His family became refugees, fleeing from King Herod, who was seeking to kill Him.

It's obvious, from today's Gospel reading, that Mary and Joseph were law abiding - or you could say faithful, God fearing people - they faithfully obeyed the Jewish religious laws. We know that because Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth; and they went to the temple for the rite of purification after 40 days.

We are told that 'When the time came for them to be purified, according to the Law of Moses, they took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him before the Lord.'

As we read earlier He was, as the firstborn male child, consecrated to the Lord. We can see, although Jesus had come to free God's people from the bondage of the law, He was not above the law.

Jesus told us in Matthew 5: 17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Too often, we become confused between religious traditions and God's Law. Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus rejected the religious traditions of men but consistently obeyed God's holy laws.

The Holy Spirit was able to work in and around that humble, law abiding, God fearing family, and did things that have left their mark with us to this day.

We are told (v. 27) Simeon was 'moved by the Holy Spirit' and went into the Temple Courts where he met Mary and Joseph, and the Child - whom he instantly recognised as 'God's salvation'.

We're also told about the prophetess - Anna - her name means 'Grace' - was it a coincidence that she arrived just at that moment? - I don't think so!

Anna was a widow - a lowly person. Widows don't have it easy, then or now; Anna devoted herself to God, in daily Worship, prayer, and fasting.

She joined in Simeon's praise and thanksgiving - and didn't hesitate to speak out about Jesus 'to everyone who was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.' In effect, she preached the Gospel to everyone who would listen.

One writer I read says "Simeon was a man led by the Spirit of God, taught by the Word of God, and obedient to the will of God; therefore he was privileged to see the salvation of God. How important it is for people to see God's salvation - Jesus Christ - before they see death."

But, as Tom Wright, points out; although Simeon's words point to the wonder of redemption and salvation for ALL God's people, without distinction; Simeon's comments also warn us that salvation will not be an easy, painfree 'cakewalk' experience; but a journey, in which we'll see our redeemer pass through rejection, death and resurrection on the way to His ultimate, God ordained, goal.

And, as we follow Jesus, it's clear that neither should we expect an easy life in our redemption. Like our redeemer, we shouldn't be surprised if we experience rejection, suffering or even death, as we follow Him.

But, through the challenges of life, we have the joy and peace of knowing His presence with us; and the promise of eternal life in His company at the end of our time on earth.

Jesus' presence certainly changed Mary and Joseph's family dynamics - He did that even before He was born, and it continued throughout His Life.

We don't know exactly how much of God's plan for Jesus' remarkable life Mary and Joseph understood. There were certainly times when, as a child, they misunderstood Him, (see v. 50) but, we're told: "Mary stored up these things and pondered them in her heart"

The last time we hear about Mary in Scripture, in Acts 1: 14, she was in the Upper Room - with the other believers - "praying constantly" and awaiting the Holy Spirit as Jesus had instructed them. She may not have understood everything, but she faithfully followed Jesus to the end.

She had to watch His crucifixion yet, after His death, she still faithfully followed His instructions to His disciples.

So, as we move on into this year, we should allow this passage to guide us and allow Jesus to 'Change our family dynamics'

We must allow Jesus to change the dynamics of this Church - his family - and be willing to surrender our work, our worship and our lives to Him?

Like Simeon - we should be prepared to be people led by the Spirit of God, taught by the Word of God, and obedient to the will of God;

So that, like Simeon, we also may be privileged to see the salvation of God. "To see God's salvation - Jesus Christ - and to spend eternal life with Him."

And we'll be able to rejoice in the confidence that our names are on the list of those who have been 'saved' rather than the list of those who've been 'lost!' ...
Amen

Let's PRAY