

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 28 January 2024
Candlemas**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. Our Epiphany season draws to a glorious close with the presentation of the baby Jesus in the temple. And, Mary and Joseph come for purification. More about this later in this edition! It is a very ancient tradition.

We also witness again the deep and personal faith of the elderly Simeon and Anna. God reveals his plan of salvation to them and through them. What a marvellous advert for faith in old age!

Young and old, we all have a role to play in Christ's Kingdom.

May you be inspired by this!

God bless,

Revd Katrina

Vicar

Phone No. 01604 812907

Mobile No. 07710 464675

E-mail: katrinahutchins94@yahoo.co.uk

As you prepare to enter God's temple with Mary and Joseph, and their baby Son, turn your heart towards God's light of love, be filled with his hope.



In a world where people walk in darkness,
let us turn our faces to the light,
to the light of God revealed in Jesus,
to the Daystar scattering our night.

Robert Willis (b. 1947)

CCLI reported

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Purifying!

PREPARING OURSELVES

*Take a moment to be still in God's presence, and feel his love.
You may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love - here,
in this room. You may also wish to have a bowl of water ready for the
time of letting go. When you are ready, say this opening prayer.*

Lord Jesus, like Anna and Simeon,
I accept your invitation to come
and spend time in your presence,
and be cleansed and refreshed by your Spirit in me.
Open my heart to your love,
and my soul to your words to me.
Speak, Lord, for I am listening. **Amen.**

LETTING GO

*If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets,
with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, offer them to
God in the silence of your heart. And then, reflect on the chorus to
our Candlemas hymn.*

For the light is stronger than the darkness
and the day will overcome the night,
though the shadows linger all around us,
let us turn our faces to the light.

*Robert Willis (b. 1947)
CCLI reported*



*If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water
and make the sign of the cross on your palm.
Feel our Lord's love and compassion,
receive his forgiveness.*

Our Candlemas chorus speaks to us of the glorious opening to John's Gospel. Notice how God does not promise that his Son's coming will bring an end to the darkness in our lives. Instead, he offers a light for us to seek and turn towards. Ponder how Christ is your light of hope.

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.

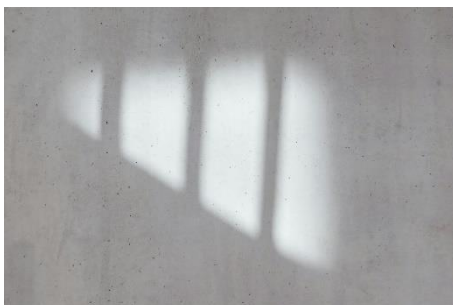
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:1-5

Light shows the way in the darkness. Light brightens our days - revealing the beauty of God's creation. Light warms our lives. Light can burn away the dross in our lives. Light gives us the power to cook our meals. Light enables us to look into the faces of family and friends and strangers. Light is essential to life.

Contemplate which of these descriptions also apply to Jesus our King, who said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life.' John 8:12

When you are ready, move on to ponder how your faith is helping you to offer a light of hope to someone you know who is struggling in the deep darkness of their life or to help those further afield who are struggling.



In a world where suffering of the helpless
casts a shadow all along the way,
let us bear the cross of Christ with gladness
and proclaim the dawning of the day.

Robert Willis (b. 1947)

CCLI reported

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER

(The Collect)

Today, this prayer is being said across our villages and the worldwide Church. Add your voice to the earthly circle of prayer to our Saviour.

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and glory of Israel:
make your home among us,
and present us pure and holy
to your heavenly Father,
your God, and our God. **Amen.**

Our prayer for Candlemas invites us to contemplate the cleansing, purifying and perfecting we receive through God's gift of salvation. Yes, there is the cross where Jesus suffers to atone for our sins. BUT - there is also the life and teaching of Jesus. He is our role model for life. Following his example helps us to become more and more like him, more as we were born to be. Pause to ponder how this is true for you. Give thanks to Jesus, our Lord for the way that he has inspired your daily living.

I love the way that this prayer echoes what Mary and Joseph did on Candlemas Day for Jesus. When your life draws to close, it is Jesus who will present you to his Father in the heavenly temple. Present you as pure and holy. What a beautiful image. What a powerful sign of our Lord's purifying love and his Father's too. Ponder the hope in this image.

Give thanks to God with the words of this final verse.



Let us light a candle in the darkness,
in the face of death a sign of life;
as a sign of hope where all seems hopeless,
as a sign of peace in place of strife.

Robert Willis (b. 1947)

CCLI reported

*May this candle of life and hope and peace shine in all hearts,
especially in the darkest situations in our world today.*

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Jesus is presented in the Temple

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother 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.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Purifying!

Our Candlemas reading opens with this simple introduction, 'When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord...). Mary and Joseph have come to dedicate Jesus to his Father's service, and to receive cleansing after the uncleanness of childbirth. It is a very ancient tradition in the law of Moses. Usually, it is the mother who comes for purification after the messiness of giving birth. But, on this occasion, Joseph seeks God's cleansing too. Perhaps, it is a sign of how overawed he is at finding himself responsible for God's own Son - the Saviour of his people - and he feels unworthy of his calling. Wouldn't you in his shoes?

I don't know what words were said over Mary and Joseph by the priest, but there is a centuries-old service in the Book of Common Prayer for women coming back to church after child-birth. It is a service of thankfulness to God for the safe delivery of a new life (which was by no means certain). It includes this beautiful prayer of purification and praise.

O Almighty God, we give thee humble thanks
for that thou hast vouchsafed to deliver this woman
thy servant from the great pain and peril of child-birth:
grant, we beseech thee, most merciful Father,
that she through thy help may both
faithfully live and walk according to thy will, in this present life;
and also may be partaker of everlasting glory in the life to come;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

It speaks to me of offering praise and seeking purification of our lives when we come through a dark time of trial and tribulation. When the darkness eases and we find ourselves moving into calmer waters, we can look back and give thanks for our safe delivery. We can look forward, humbly and hopefully, and seek our Lord's help in living the coming days faithfully, guided by the light of his love and his teaching. For we are safe, held by his promise to us. Jesus said, 'I came that you may have life...'

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some Candlemas prayers. Feel free to add your own.

Lord Jesus, at Candlemas, we see your light dawning in the faces of Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna. I feel your light in my heart, and I turn my face towards your warming rays. Lord, purify my life.

Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, Simeon looked into your face and his lit up with joy as he praised God for the salvation you brought into our world. Your gift is for all peoples. Your light shines in their darkness. Shine, I pray on...

Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, Simeon felt his life to be complete. He was ready for death, and could face it with hope. Lord, I think of my family and friends who fear old age, dying and death. Fill their hearts, Lord, with peace. I pray...

Lord, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

O God, you search me and you know me,
all my thoughts and feelings are open to your gaze,
you see the paths I will take before I take them. Guide my daily living.
Bless me and keep my loved ones safe, I pray. **Amen.**