

## Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal at Candlemas Evensong, 2025

Passages: Haggai 2.1-9, John 2.18-22

I wonder what your memories of Candlemas are, over the years? I'll be honest that most of mine are of the French traditions for Chandeleur. When we moved to France in January two thousand and five, we discovered, with delight, that we would get two Pancake Days in quick succession – first French crepes for Candlemas, then British or American pancakes on Shrove Tuesday. But the pancake tradition, lovely though it is, is a bit of a distraction from the main theme of Candlemas, which is the theme of Light.

Interestingly, our readings this evening don't mention the light so much – for that, you needed to be in one of our morning services, and if you came to our 10:45 service you will have seen our children processing around the church with their Liichtmëssdag lanterns. This tradition is much more in line with the words of Simeon in the Nunc Dimittis, which is a highlight of our Evensong this evening. The Nunc Dimittis is a key part of every Evensong service, but for Candlemas it moves out of its traditional place to become the focus of our candle-lit procession. What are the words of Simeon which we will sing/hear sung? Simeon recognises in the infant Jesus: God's salvation, prepared before the face of all people, to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of God's people Israel.

A light – God's light, come into the world. Simeon stood in the temple, waiting for God's promised salvation, and he recognised God's light and glory in the baby Jesus. This presentation of Jesus in the temple is the reason our readings this evening focus on prophecies about the temple. Haggai talks about the former glory of the temple, which has become much reduced. The Lord promises that his house, the temple, will once again be filled with his splendour, and that the treasure of all nations shall come to it.

Listening to that as the first hearers, we could easily understand that it's a prophecy about stone, wood and precious metals, that God's temple will be rebuilt in architectural splendour, and that gifts of great value will be brought to it. And it's important to recognise that this is how it was initially meant to be understood, and how many Jewish readers will still understand it.

But in our reading from John, Jesus himself, the light of God who suddenly came to the temple as a baby at Candlemas, starts moving his listeners away from the idea that *the temple*, always means **the** Temple. How confusing! How shocking! When is a temple, not a temple? When, Jesus tells us, that temple is his own body. And St Paul later goes on to remind the community of believers that they too, are temples. As Christians, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

This may give us a new way of understanding Haggai's prophecy of the treasure of all nations coming to God's temple. Jesus gives us permission to interpret the temple... as himself: the temple which will be destroyed then rise again, is Jesus. Does this also give us permission to understand the treasure of all nations, as those of us, Gentiles in the most part, who have come to the risen Christ in worship? As followers of Jesus gather all around the world in worship, are those differing Christians of differing cultures and different worship styles 'the treasure of all nations'? If so, we at All Saints are part of that diverse treasure trove of people, drawn to the temple of God this evening.

What do we find when we arrive at the temple? Haggai tells us we can find the splendour, the glory and the prosperity of God. Simeon tells us we find salvation. In the words of Mary's radical song, the Magnificat, we have sung this evening that we find mercy, and hierarchy-toppling lifting up of the humble and meek.

Jesus Christ, light of the world, is the risen temple in which we find this paradoxical new way. The light and the glory of God in a baby. Splendour, glory and prosperity, modelled by the man who died the death of a defeated criminal. Salvation and mercy along with loss of privileges for the mighty and the rich.

This is revolutionary! Jesus turned the world upside down through teaching and demonstrating that God is willing to live with us, love us, show us the way of peace, die for a world which cannot redeem itself, and defeat death by rising again.

Splendour, and mercy. Glory, and sacrifice. Prosperity, and loss of privilege.

Which part of this light-filled revolution of God is calling to you, this evening?