

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal at the 10:45 service on Candlemas, 2025

Passages: Malachi 3: 1-5, Luke 2:22-40

Do you know why Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple when he was 30 days old? It wasn't his circumcision... that was for the eighth day, so that had already been done. This was for the presentation of firstborn sons to God. It was, and still is, a custom Jewish families follow, and it's both a commemoration and a commitment.

In terms of commemoration, those of you who are firstborn children, might particularly remember the final plague in Egypt. Over a thousand years before Jesus, Jacob's descendants were enslaved in Egypt, oppressed by Pharaoh. When God was in the process of liberating his people, a series of plagues hit the people of Egypt, and the final, very horrible one, was the death of the firstborn – animals and children. God protected the firstborn of the enslaved Israelites, so they became special to him, and ever after firstborn sons were presented to him after 30 days. In Jesus' time, parents would take their firstborn to the temple and 'buy him back', a child offered to God in gratitude and recognition, but also a child redeemed back into his family. This is what Joseph and Mary were doing in the Temple – faithfully thanking God for God's rescuing, redeeming work in the past, and committing their firstborn son to God's word, and God's ways.

Think how much this centuries-old Jewish tradition was foreshadowing the work himself Jesus was going to do. Jesus' name, Yeshua in Hebrew, means God will save his people. The baby Jesus, whose parents dedicated him to follow God's *word*, grew up to be the one we know as the Word of God. This infant Jesus, whose parents committed him as a follower of God's *way*, grew up to proclaim that he is The Way. This tiny child Jesus, whose family was too poor to afford anything but the cheapest pigeons as an offering, turns out to be, as Malachi put it, 'The Lord whom you seek', suddenly coming to his temple.

As we heard V. read, Malachi prophesied that the coming Lord, would be like a refiner and a purifier of silver – separating the dross of injustice and infidelity from the people, leaving behind only what was good in them, so that they could come before the Lord to present their offerings. It seems astonishing that this purifying, blazing light should suddenly come to the temple in the form of a baby from a modest family. And it seems even less likely that anyone should notice this unremarkable family bringing their baby, as countless Jewish families must have done.

But you heard M. read to us from Luke, the Gospel writer who had access to Mary's account of Jesus' infancy. There *were* two older people in the temple, who were living in step with God. Here at All Saints, just as in God's church around the world, we are aiming to be like those people, Simeon and Anna. Anna and Simeon weren't people going through the motions, turning up at the temple once a week, and expecting God to keep his respectful distance during the rest of their lives. They were people longing to see where God was at work in their own unpredictable times, and who, in different ways, were aligning themselves in prayer and expectancy, to the work of the Holy Spirit. This is our vision here at All Saints.

These two spiritually alert people were, at least in Anna's case, very elderly. Simeon could have been younger, but let's say he was at least my age, given his history and his willingness to accept that his days could now draw to a close. They're in the temple, open to God's work in their world, and they see a couple of childbearing age, Joseph and Mary. To add to this intergenerational mix, we have the month-old baby, Jesus. Multiple generations, meeting up in

the temple that day, for the work and the will of God to be fulfilled, and for a blessing which would spread from Jesus to the whole world.

I believe this is a vision of worship that we can identify with, and pray for, here at All Saints. In our service today we've appreciated the Lichtmessdag procession from our younger members, and our youth pastor Joy has helped them, and us, to think about how this Luxembourg tradition links to Jesus, the light of God in our world. Joy herself is one of the many parents of young children who are here today, and the intergenerational theme keeps on going: I'm older than Joy, and I've been privileged to interview L., who's told us about what she'll be doing, having left her job, This Time Tomorrow.

Why is intergenerational church life important? Why do we prioritise our work with children and young people? Why do we support the parents in our church? Why do we listen to people who are older than us? Why do we care what fellow All Saints are doing tomorrow? Because we're not here to go through the motions, turning up on a Sunday and expecting God to keep his respectful distance during the rest of our lives. Like Simeon and Anna, I believe we're sensing a *growing* urgency to see where God is at work in our own unpredictable times. Like those two elders of the temple, we want to align ourselves in prayer and expectancy, to the work of God's Holy Spirit here in Luxembourg.

The role of your clergy team: me, Geoff, Father Martin, Paola and Joy, is to help equip you all to join in with God at work wherever you are. Wherever you are on Monday, wherever you are on Wednesday lunchtime, wherever you are on Friday night, God is there and God is at work. God's light may be found in surprising places as you go about your week. Other people may find God's light in you! God's light was a tiny baby in the temple, but the people who were tuned in, spotted that unlikely source of salvation. This week, may *we go, bringing light*, may we seek God's light, *wherever we go*. This time tomorrow, I'll be praying for you all. Wherever you will be, remember that God is there with you, light in your darkness, light for the world.