

## Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read at Evensong on Candlemas Sunday 2026

Texts: Haggai 2:1-9, John 2:18-22

Did you see the item in this week's e-News about the environmental cost of demolition in Luxembourg

“Luxembourg is particularly affected by the demolition, rather than refurbishment, of buildings. This causes loss of cultural heritage and does not address the consequences of rising rents, wasted resources and damage to the environment. Please consider signing [this EU petition](#): ‘to create incentives that make the renovation and transformation of existing buildings the new norm’.



Demolition and rebuilding, or renovation and transformation of a particular building, the Temple, is at the heart of both of our Bible readings this evening

Built originally by King Solomon in C10 BC the Temple played a crucial role for the Jews, a meeting place of heaven and earth, where God in some sense was believed to dwell.

In the account in 2 Chronicles of the dedication, as the *shekinah* glory of God's presence descends, there is an almost comic scene where the priests and other religious leader are so overwhelmed that they stream out of the building, unable to bear this holy presence

That then developed into an elaborate set of rituals and zones, safety measures to protect worshippers from getting too close to the holy of holies and the Holy One who dwelt there

This belief in the Temple as the place where God dwells on earth explains the trauma of C6BC when the Babylonians invade the land, sack Jerusalem, destroy the temple and take the people into exile

For what does that say about the power of God, if the place of His presence can be treated like that?

It also explains why, in Exile in Babylon, the Jews ask: how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land - away from Jerusalem, away from the Temple and therefore away from God's presence

But its there that, in the words of the EU petition, we see the creation of (quote) “incentives that make the renovation and transformation of existing buildings the norm”

But it's the start of a transformation of understanding: about how God can be present

Eventually it will lead us to the words and actions of Jesus as he stands in the second or replacement Temple that had been rebuilt in 516 BC as the people return from Exile

Haggai speaks into that rebuilding, a second Temple that by comparison with the first one seemed very disappointing

But it was a temple that then stood for nearly five hundred years before King Herod started renovating it, expanding it in 20BC, in a way not unlike the new White House ball room, a project which by the time of Jesus stands in there had been going for nearly fifty years

... And just as the understanding of God's presence and the place of the Temple was transformed while the people were in Exile - "I am with you, do not fear ..."

... just as Haggai prophesies the same thing as the second so much less impressive one is built - read v5-6, "*for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts,<sup>5</sup> according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.*"

... so now, as John records it in his gospel, Jesus transforms our understanding of God's presence, as he overturns the money changers tables in the second Herod temple at the start of his ministry and then takes the language and notion of temple and transforms it

*<sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body.<sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*

The temple is his body, God's presence in a new and unprecedented way - Emmanuel, God with us - a new way of God being present that continues on through Jesus' death and resurrection, on through His ascension and then the giving of the Holy Spirit - Jesus not just with us, but in us

So that, as St Paul says, we as church together become the Body of Christ, and as we, in our individual lives become "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19-20)

This festival of Candlemas is all about this transformation of how God is present

Yes, focused on the way his parents brought Jesus as a baby to the Temple to thank and dedicate, how Simeon recognises him and rejoices in the words we have just used in the Nunc Dimittis; Lord, now let you servant go in peace, my eyes have seen you salvation

But all is part of the much bigger story of God's presence in a new way through the cross and then resurrection, as the Temple of Christ's body is destroyed but then raised again in three days



This is the pivot point of human history

And as it happens, do you remember how the temple curtain, part of that elaborate series of safety measures and zones, is ripped from top to bottom - God throwing open the doors, issuing the passionate and loving invitation to all for access to His presence

I wonder how many times in our BCP liturgy we use these words: “through Jesus Christ our Lord”

We go “through” a door,

“through” also is about how something is made possible through something or someone

So “through” is the language of access and “through” is the language of recognition of how that is made possible

So you could say “through” is about invitation and response

What might it mean for you to embrace more deeply those words - “through Jesus Christ our Lord”?

Or, in the words of that EU petition, to “renovate and transform” how He is present to you