

## Vicar's Letter for February 2018

Dear Friends

A couple of people at St Matthew's work in retail and tell me that at the end of the day on Christmas Eve they and the other staff are busy taking all the Christmas stuff off the shelves and getting ready for the Sales! I have seen Christmas trees outside people's houses on Boxing Day waiting for the next bin collection. And everyone saying, 'well, that's Christmas over with for another year'!

And I get funny looks when I say that Christmas for us as Christians doesn't end on with the end of December. No, we have Epiphanytide and then a few more weeks until February 2nd which for us marks the final end of Christmastide. Our Christmas crib remains up in Church throughout to remind us of this season.

February 2nd is the day when we commemorate Jesus being brought to the Temple by Mary and Joseph 40 days after his birth to present him to the Lord in accordance with Jewish custom. And it was at this ceremony that Anna and Simeon, two elderly and faithful people recognise the baby Jesus as 'a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel'. These words are recorded in the Gospel of Luke (chapter 2) and spoken by Simeon. They are part of the 'Nunc Dimittis' which is still used in the service of Evensong.

This celebration on 2nd February is known as The Presentation of Christ in the Temple or Candlemas. As the second name suggests it is a festival of light. Often in our celebrations we hold lit candles in our church services to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the world, and that just as he has come to be our light we too are to shine with his light in all that we do. We will keep Candlemas / The Presentation of Christ in the Temple in our Church this year on Sunday 28th January, which is the Sunday nearest the actual date itself.

But this celebration as well as marking the end of Christmastide also turns our thoughts to the next few months ahead, and we look to the beginning of Lent and prepare ourselves for the events of Holy Week: Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion, before our joyful celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter.

Our world is often a dark place, not only with the dreary, grey weather at the moment, but with the puzzling, terrible and incomprehensible things that are happening in our world for which we have no answers: terrorist attacks, natural disasters, personal tragedies amongst our own families and friends, the cruelty and greed of some and the suffering of the poor and vulnerable.

Candlemas is a time to remind us of Christ's constant presence with us, still alive in the midst of chaos and confusion; that Christ is the Light still shining in the bleakness and blackness of our world, and that we are the ones through whom Christ's light can be visible - through our deeds of kindness and acts of compassion as well as through our faithful praying for the people we meet and the world issues around us.

Here is part of a poem by Ann Lewin which we might like to use as our prayer this month:

'Lord Christ, set me on fire,  
Burn from me all that dims your light,

Kindle an answering flame in lives around,  
That darkness may be driven back,  
And glory stream into this world,  
Transforming it with love.'

With every blessing  
Kate