

Candlemas is in many ways a strange festival. It is both a confident statement of the purpose and the promise of our faith; as well as being a recognition of the sense of longing and hope we have for the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

Candlemas marks the end of 3 seasons which have encapsulated these two images. The longing and yearning which mark the season of Advent; the confidence and hope in the birth of Christ at Christmas, and then the ongoing clarification of who Jesus is and the purpose of his ministry during the season of Epiphany. And then today – 40 days after Jesus birth we mark that moment when Mary and Joseph bring their new born son to the temple, according to the obligations called for in Leviticus¹. They like all new parents they come to give thanks with a sense of hope and excitement about this new child they will raise, and also with some apprehension about the responsibility that parenting brings, let alone parenting the son of God.

On arriving at the temple they encounter others who share in these same mixed feelings – Simeon and Anna who have spent much of their lives waiting and believing that God will bring justice for Israel. They too are confident of who God is, but also yearning for more.

Today we are launching our revised Mission Action Plan. It is quite a big document with nearly 47 goals. As a number of members of the PCC remarked on Thursday night this is unrealistic – and almost foolish to present. As we also agreed at the PCC it feels at times a little confusing because it is a statement of what we believe, what we are already doing and what we might hope to achieve. And yet we have confidently still provided it to every member of the congregation today – why?

Well – it is what it is for a reason! Our Mission Action Plan in a sense embodies the themes of Candlemas. It is both a confident statement of the purpose and promise of our faith and who we say we are here in Queens Park; But it is more than that – it is also our statement of our longing and hope – of how we want to be the love of Christ in this community and beyond. It is both Epiphany and Advent together – it is our understanding of self and God, and our longing for our community, ourselves and our faith. I invite you now to take a brief look at what we are saying.

The front page of our plan has not changed since 2013. It is a statement of our belief and who we long to be. It is a statement of our commitment as ambassadors – that we will be confident, compassionate and creative in the way that we share and live

¹Leviticus 12:3-8

out our faith in Christ. The remaining 7 pages spells out the how we are hoping to do that!

If you turn to pages 2-3, you will see our goals to be confident. We plan to be good stewards of the resources we have, we want to grow our worshipping community, and share our faith with one another. We also affirm our long term commitment to the London Inter Faith Centre, especially in resourcing it with Fr Laurence and continue to commit to our relationship with the United Reformed Church. Many of these items are ongoing, but there is a few new things like thinking through how we pray, and allow others to leave prayers in the building, and to also look at how we invite people to social events and to church.

If we now flip over to the middle pages (4 -5) we list our goals for how we compassionately serve the community – through social action, local engagement and social life. Again some of these are ongoing like supporting My Move and Tea and Chat; supporting Salusbury World and Laurence’s Larder. But also we long to build on this with more intentional actions – one of these will happen through Capital Mass which is the agency of the Diocese of London who are supporting parishes support refugees and the vulnerable. Capital Mass for example helps us to link with others working in similar ways with refugees and the homeless, so that we can be most effective, rather than re-inventing the wheel – so to speak. We also want to be clearer in our community so that we and others know what we are doing. **We actually achieve an astounding amount for a small community and we should honour this – give thanks to God for it, and make sure we share this experience.**

When Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple – they honour who they are and what God has done. If they did not go, the wonder of Jesus would not have been proclaimed by Simeon and Anna. We should learn from this. If we do not let others know what we are doing and why, then we do not honour ourselves or God.

The final section which starts on page 6 is about how we embrace our creativity in sharing God’s love and hope. Again this is a mixture of ongoing commitments to accessible worship and active discipleship, as well as how we engage with the community – like how welcoming we are to new people, or our sharing in the 2-minute slot, or our part in Open-gardens. But is also preparing to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the building, or signposting vulnerable people to services, of investigating new ways of engaging with people in this community.

We have stated in the whole of this document things which are our reality and things which are our yearning. We know we are capable of achieving most of these things, but we know that we will probably not achieve all of them. This should not

stop our yearning, dreaming or praying however. Please take time to read it more closely, to think about your part in it, and in our collective yearning.

In the statement I read at the beginning of today's worship which stated why we celebrate today

Today, we celebrate both the joy of his coming and his searching judgement, looking back to the day of his birth and forward to the coming days of his passion.²

Our faith in part is always held in this space, the reality of Christ incarnation – God becomes human, AND the reality of humanities brokenness which leads to Jesus death and the hope of the resurrection which is realised at the end of his passion. Our faith is always holding the tension of the story we know of Christ and the looking forward – while intentionally living now. Our Mission Action Plan attempts to reflect this tension of who are, who we long to be, and the actual getting on with being !

In the image of Jesus being lifted up by Simeon we have a similar image – the past – those who longed for a messiah, those who longed for a more intimate experience of God, who longed for a different experience of humanity where justice and hope might reign. And the future – the child Jesus both human and divine, a helpless infant and yet the source of all hope and expectation that things would change.

Today, as we stand with our amended vision for this parish, we also stand in the vision of Christ as we visibly turn away from the crib and to the cross that will draw us too and through Lent in the coming weeks.

God's yearning for us continues throughout all our lives. For God yearns that we might grow more and more like Christ, and in Christ, each day -This is the essence of this festival of Candlemas. That the yearning of God and of a people is fulfilled in the humanity of Christ in the world – a light to lighten all nations! But the yearning never ceases as creation continues to groan for the Kingdom of God to be realised here on earth.

As Simeon and Anna recognised the fulfilment of this yearning in Christ- we are invited to recognise this light within each other – as we work together in this community. Our yearning to be faithful followers of Christ in this place.

At the end of our service today we will extinguish the candles around the crib and turn to face the yearning of our community – for like Simeon and Anna, in Christ we have seen our own salvation and the salvation of all people through Christ's love and light throughout the world – and it is this which gives us courage to yearn for difference and to work together on our Mission Plan. Amen

² Common Worship 2011

Candlemas 31st January 2016
Malachi 3:1-5; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40