

Liturgy Matters; February 2021

“A light to enlighten the Gentiles.....”

The greeting of Simeon which is recounted by Saint Luke on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord (February 2nd) gathers together all the hopes and promises of the Old Testament. As ‘the watcher in the temple’, Simeon recognises in the person of the child Jesus a fulfilment and a revealing (epiphany) of what God had promised to his people – that he would be ‘Emmanuel’, God-with-us.

Simeon’s life is now literally ‘full-filled’, it has reached its climax and its goal, “for my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all peoples, the light to enlighten the gentiles and be the glory of Israel, your people”.

Simeon can now welcome even death itself because he has now experienced the fidelity and love of God, “At last all-powerful Master, you give leave to your servant to go in peace, according to your promise...”

These words are used by the church each day of the year as part of Night Prayer (known as ‘compline’, from the Latin suggesting something which completes, perfects or brings to a close), for in the life of the church, in word and in sacrament, we too share Simeon’s delight in recognising the fulfilment of God’s promises.

In times past it was only on the feast of the Presentation (known sometimes as the ‘Purification’, or the ‘Encounter’) that Christmastide ended. The revision of the liturgical calendar after the Second Vatican Council fixed the feast of the Baptism of the Lord as the conclusion of the Christmas season, leaving February 2nd as a feast of light in the midst of the Ordinary Time of the Year.

The theme of light, so much present during the seasons of Advent and Christmastide, is one which recurs frequently in the scriptures and in our liturgy. It speaks most powerfully of the presence and action of God in our lives – scattering darkness and guiding the way, but also it speaks of our own role and mission for the world and the society in whose life we share – we are called to bring to others the light of the Good News, preaching perhaps at times with words, but at all times through our actions.

In these days of continued uncertainty and difficulty our response to the call to be a **light-bearer** is perhaps ever more urgently needed.

Canon Philip