

Year A Candlemas 5th February 2023

Malachi 3: 1-4

Hebrews 2: 14-18

Luke 2: 22-40

Today we have just heard the story of Simeon and Anna told from Anna's perspective – the woman's experience of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. Because, despite Simeon's role and words – which to us we may know as the Nunc Dimittis – this story is as much about the women.

It was the Jewish rite of purification, forty days after giving birth to our Lord, that led to Mary and Joseph arriving in the Temple that day. It was the culmination of the faithful waiting of Simeon and also of Anna. Mary was deemed unclean or impure after the bloody business of childbirth and was only allowed back into the Temple to worship after she had presented herself to the priest forty days later, and to then have a ritual cleansing bath.

It was also a rite of passage that a first-born male was presented to God in God's Temple, thanks were offered, to redeem the son for God.

Mary had much to ponder – first all those visitors at the birth, and now Simeon and Anna creating such a fuss of her beautiful child – for every child is indeed beautiful – and drawing attention from other people in the Temple. I'm not sure, as a young mother, she wanted that attention.

And then we have Anna. She had waited so many years. And like Simeon, her steadfast faith had helped her live through God's time,

until the moment she and Simeon had wished for, but I wonder if they ever really expected it to happen.

As some of you will know, this Bible passage can make me a bit emotional. It is such a human story of Simeon and Anna's faith, of Simeon knowing he can now be set free to die in peace, having seen his Lord; and of Anna's patient waiting and during that waiting being a wise counsel to so many people coming to the Temple.

The story is historical. But it is not just a story of 2000 years ago. It is a story which continues to happen. In a sense we are all waiting for the promise of Christ's arrival, but in another sense, through our prayer, through our worship, through trying our hardest to follow the way of Christ, we can look with Christ's eyes on our broken world and see Christ in others. We may get a strong sense of Christ's presence at communion, or when journeying alongside someone who is in need. We may get a strong sense of Christ's presence when we pray, silently on our own, in meditation, or communally. We may get a sense of Christ's presence when we sing or when we hear music.

I wonder how do you get a sense of Christ's presence?

Each one of us is different, and like Simeon and Anna, our awareness of Christ's presence, and being flooded with the love of and for Jesus may come upon us unawares; it is likely to happen on a day that started out just like any other.

May you be open to Christ's presence in your life, today and always.