

Address by Belinda Speed Andrews (at St David's only) for 30 January 2022

The story we remember this morning is that of the baby Jesus being bought into the temple and being placed in the arms of an old man, a devout old man, Simeon. It is a beautiful & evocative story & I don't know about you, but I love this story. I love this story too perhaps because it reflects my experience as a Muslim. After each birth I had a period of 40 days confinement followed by ritual cleansing, the child is brought before the community and welcomed. Prayers are said for those who have gone before those still with us and for the future of the child and either a cow or a goat is slaughtered - a gift from the parents to the wider community - food is cooked communally and people come together to celebrate this new life over food and good conversation. I too was fulfilling the law just as Mary & Joseph were.

Today we are at the end of Christmas & Epiphany where Jesus comes among us and is revealed to us. We now have a period of Ordinary time, a breather if you will as we prepare for the holy season of Lent and onto the passion of Jesus and resurrection. The reading in Luke today is the final revelation to us in this season which answers the 'why has Jesus come among us?'

I want you for a moment to close your eyes and imagine you are in the temple and if it helps, you are surrounded by candles, and a young family walk in with their new born baby and an old man greets them and with the child in his arms you hear the following: 'Now lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory to your people Israel'.

At this moment in time, in this precious moment you are standing on Holy ground; you are listening to the revelation that this baby in the arms of an old man, is 'the' Messiah and the answer to 'why has Jesus come among us?' He is to be the glory of your people Israel, but I think more importantly, at the beginning of his life with us, here on earth, is that he came as a light to lighten the gentiles; the Gentiles are included in this circle of light that is Jesus Christ. Jesus in this one moment in the temple where the Jews worshipped Yahweh, where ritual sacrifices were made to atone for the sins of the people, Simeon, an old devout man declares, through the Holy Spirit, that this baby is widening the circle of those who belong; widening it to the rest of humanity; everyone belongs, not just the Israelites, everyone.

May I dare to be provocative now? If this passage answers the 'why did Jesus come among us?', dare I ask us as a community, 'why are we here?' There may be many different reasons why each of us is here today and all of them valid; we are all here for one reason or another and this morning we come as a community to bring praise and worship to God who created heaven & earth. This morning we all, I hope are fed and watered spiritually through word, music, prayer, silence, and the sacraments and then in the final prayer we say, 'send us out into the world to live and work to your praise & glory'.

Before we say those final words, we pray; 'we whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world'. We have been called into the circle of light and in these few words are asking God, through the Spirit, to help us give light to the world as we go out into the world to live and work to God's praise & glory.

Are we as a community, widening that circle of light or are we keeping our circle of light here in this beautiful building?

As you know a group of us have been meeting over the last few months to discern, to discuss, to pray about & to discover where God might be calling us over the next few years. Part of those discussions are about how we as a community can widen the circle of light wider and deeper into the community; a meeting between church and the world and the light we carry as Christians is to shine into the world. We can carry on as we are, and that is fine, there is much to be celebrated already in our community. But the verse of scripture that we have as the core of our discussions is from John 14:12 'Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father'.

In this one verse, Jesus promises that we will do what he does, but in fact better than that because he has gone to the Father. He has equipped us with all we need and more and he is now freeing us up, he lets go of us so that we can do more. It's just like Simeon; 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word'. Now I can go, my life has come to a point of fulfilment; I can let go. Jesus' life too at the point in the verse from John, has reached its fulfilment and at that point of fulfilment he has released us to go forward and do more.

So, what is that more and is it why we are here, in part? What are some of the ideas we have been mulling over in our conversations?

Do you dare to dream? Dream of what might be, of what can be? Dare you dream to be a part of God's Kingdom here and now; we pray most days don't we, 'thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. So briefly, we are hoping to open the church more often and when it is open to serve tea & coffee - it may become a full grown cafe over time, but baby steps first; we want to provide internet so that students and people of all ages feel that they can come in here and rest, work, study, meet in a safe space; to work with offenders by providing a place where they can learn skills that will enable them to find employment; to create opportunities whereby people are empowered and affirmed in who they are and find a way to use the gifts God has given them; a place where music, art & theatre can come alive and all of this held in, surrounded by and within our worshipping community, because what we have here and now this morning is the basis that all of the above will rest.

Of course, none of this will happen overnight and to be able to do some or all of the above we have to be a viable worshipping community in the Church of England and that means the office of Church warden needs to be filled whether that is an individual or a group of people working together. I would encourage you all to read Glynis's article in the church magazine, New Leaves, either hard copy, available at the back of the church or on our website. It also means finding funding and the creation of a permanent role within St David's of Church Manager/Chaplain. We are therefore looking for at least £200,000 in initial funding.

This may seem impossible but when I think about the possibility that we are enlarging the circle of light that is Jesus both in and outside these four walls I am excited. Jesus has promised us that we can do all of this and more. This though is not a one-man job, this is a community project, where those in the circle of light find a place to live and to flourish and as we extend this circle of light outwards, so too others may, by the grace of God live and flourish too. Amen.