

**Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 31 January 2021  
The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple  
Candlemas**

**Please use this material with the order of service for  
Virtual Worship for Christmas & Epiphany 2020-2021**

**Beginning worship**

Begin worship by lighting a candle. As you light it say, 'Let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.'

**Collects for Presentation of Christ in the Temple**

Almighty and ever-living God,  
clothed in majesty,  
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple,  
in substance of our flesh:  
grant that we may be presented to you  
with pure and clean hearts,  
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*(or)*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
light of the nations and glory of Israel:  
make your home among us,  
and present us pure and holy  
to your heavenly Father,  
your God, and our God.

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#### Readings

#### **Malachi 3:1-5**

#### **The Coming Messenger**

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

#### **Luke 2: 22-40**

#### **Jesus Is Presented in the Temple**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when

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the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.’

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

#### **The Return to Nazareth**

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

#### **Reflection**

Alison and I have just finished watching on Netflix ‘Unorthodox’. It is a gripping four-episode semi-autobiographical drama about a young ultra-orthodox Hasidic Jewish girl’s rebellion against her New York religious community. The film’s attention to detail means we really get

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a sense of life in the community from Friday evening kiddush, to the youngest child's four questions at Passover and to Esther's preparation for her arranged marriage at 18, wedding and subsequent life as a Jewish wife. But Esther's restless spirit, her disappointment with married life leads her to make a bold move to freedom and another life in Berlin. I won't tell you more – watch the film!

Clearly for Deborah Feldman who wrote the book on which the film is based, there is considerable criticism of the ultra-Jewish way of life and we might find ourselves thinking wrongly that all Jewish women find the very traditional orthodox background, oppressive and restrictive. But we have to be careful. Undoubtedly that will be true for some, but equally many Jewish women find meaning, value and purpose in their faith and Jewish customs. Christianity too has many traditions and as times change, traditions and teachings adapt to new circumstances. If you watch 'Unorthodox' and then read the presentation of Christ in the Temple from Luke's Gospel, you can't but be struck by how similar and significant the Jewish customs, laws and beliefs are for Mary and Joseph.

According to the Torah or Law and in line with the teaching of the rabbis, 40 days after the birth and circumcision of a male child, a woman would have to make an offering to God to purify her body and so become part of the worshipping community again. If you watch Unorthodox you will see how significant purification is for women (as well as men). Esther has to learn the rituals of purification after her period and before her wedding by going through a 'mikveh' or special bath. In Jewish areas in big UK cities today there are specially dedicated buildings for mikveh and I know many Jewish women find the mikveh spiritually and emotionally liberating.

So, with that in mind we can understand why Mary and Joseph are anxious to make the long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to make their offering at the Temple. Being poor they are unable to offer a sacrifice of a lamb and a dove as required by law, but the Jewish law also allowed them to offer two doves and Luke is keen to preserve this

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detail. The ritual performed Mary is now ritually cleansed and prepared to take on her duties in the community.

So, Luke is clear – the good news is grounded and rooted in Jewish laws and community. But the greatest moment of purification is contained in the message of Simeon, which is itself almost entirely based on the prophecy of Isaiah – the promise of God’s peace and glory to all nations which Jesus the messiah will deliver. What makes the delivery of this prophecy more extraordinary is that it is also delivered by a woman, Anna. This is highly significant for Luke because it shows that from the very start the good news offered liberation to women of all classes, ages and backgrounds. Even though conservative rabbis of Jesus’ day would not allow women to study scripture, others actively encouraged women to have a good knowledge of Jewish theology. These rabbis pointed to a group of highly respected women prophets - Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther – to which Luke adds the elderly and devout Anna.

Beginning with Anna and Mary, Jesus’ ministry developed the place of women in society. Luke makes a special effort to record Jesus’ encounter with women such as Mary and Martha. Jesus also frequently had a large group of women disciples in attendance and it would be these women who would be with him at the cross when the male disciples had all abandoned him.

Jesus’ ministry was not uncritical of many aspects of Judaism, especially those ultra-orthodox Pharisaic laws which restricted the place of women and other marginalised people in society. But without the vision of the great Jewish prophets such as Isaiah and the example of those strong independent Jewish women such as Deborah and Esther, Jesus’ radical message of equality would not have been possible. Frustratingly this vision of equality is still work in progress.

Michael Wilcockson

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**When Candles Are Lighted On Candlemas Day**

1 When candles are lighted on Candlemas Day  
The dark is behind us and Spring's on the way

*Chorus*

*A glory dawns in every dark place*  
*The light of Christ the fullness of grace*

2 The kings have departed the shepherds have gone  
The Child and his parents are left on their own

3 They go to the temple obeying the law  
And offer two pigeons the gift of the poor

4 But Anna and Simeon recognise there  
The Christ-child who came at the turn of the year

5 The old who have suffered and waited so long  
See hope for the world as they welcome the young

6 They gaze at God's wonderful answer to prayer  
The joy of the Jews and the Gentiles' desire

13 The candles invite us to praise and to pray  
When Christmas greets Easter on Candlemas day

Elizabeth Cosnett  
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**Light Of The World True Light Divine**

1 Light of the world  
True Light divine  
In glory break  
And splendour shine  
Upon our nature's night  
The darkness dies  
Before the morn  
And God Himself  
A Child is born  
The long-awaited Light

2 Life of the world  
A Life laid down  
Who chose the cross  
Before the crown  
And opened Heaven's door  
He broke the chains  
Of death and hell  
Our Saviour Christ Emmanuel  
Who lives for evermore

3 Lord of all worlds  
A manger bed  
Was room enough  
To lay Your Head  
When from Your Throne above  
You came to set  
A lost world right  
Immortal Life  
Unfading Light  
And all-prevailing Love

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**Closing Prayer**

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna,  
who lived to welcome the Messiah:  
may we, who have received these gifts beyond words,  
prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes  
to bring us to eternal life;  
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen**