



GOSPEL GOSSIP

'Master, now you are dismissing
your servant in peace.'

St Luke 2. 22-40

Sunday 2 February

The season of Epiphany is, in a sense, interrupted by the festival of Candlemas. In Epiphany, we consider the 'revealing' of the Christ to all people. Although the gospel progression is not followed this Sunday, Candlemas is very much a revealing of Christ, and his recognition.

An old man, Simeon, has been promised by God that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. As a result, he was often at the Temple, and was so on the day when Mary and Joseph went there to do what the Law required following the birth of a child. Simeon saw and recognised the child Jesus as the one who was promised him, and all who were seeking redemption from God. He takes the child in his arms, blesses him, thanks God for the privilege, proclaims a song of praise, and prepares Mary for what lies ahead for her. But, as far as he is concerned, he can die in peace: God's promises have been kept, and he has seen the proof.

- Where did you/could you encounter Jesus?
- Do you think that Jesus is the one who was promised by God to take away the sins of the world?
- What will enable you to face death with at least equanimity, if not hope?
- Have you ever thanked God for the gift of his Son?
- Does God keep his promises?

Yet Simeon does more than express his joy that his eyes have seen God's salvation. More than that God's salvation has been revealed not just to him but to all – Jews and non-Jews alike. He also knows that there is a cost to God for the gift of redemption. For God himself, it was the suffering and death of his Son. For Mary, Jesus' mother, the cost would be the pain of seeing her Son's rejection by those whom he came to save, even the pain of death. For us, it is the knowledge that one day we will have to own up to all the ways in which we have failed God and one another. That's the trouble with light – it illuminates everything, not just the bits we want to be seen or can cope with being seen, but everything.

However, even this pain we have to undergo is mitigated. Right from childhood, we have come to know that it takes strength and courage to own up to something, and the consequences are better were we to do so ourselves rather than being 'found out.' And the better the relationship we have with the one to whom we have to admit failing, the more confident we are about doing so. We are more likely to own up to something to someone whom we know to be loving, understanding and forgiving and that's what God is.

- Jesus is destined for the 'falling and rising of many in Israel' – what does that mean?
- Are you prepared to have your 'inner thoughts' revealed – do you admit them to yourself, even?
- In what way is Jesus the light for you?
- Do you think of Jesus as your personal Saviour, or are you prepared to share him with others – just anyone, in fact?
- Is hardship a necessary part, or consequence of, faith?

Simeon can now depart in peace as his eyes have seen the Lord's salvation. We, too, can see the Lord's salvation if we were but able to acknowledge and recognise it. Sometimes it is fear that holds us back from believing, but Simeon's words and actions are an example and an encouragement to all of us.