

# Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021 – Candlemas

*Malachi 3.-5; Psalm 24; Hebrews 2.14-end; Luke 2.22-40*

Candlemas Sunday is one of the turning points in the Christian year. As we make our annual pilgrimage, through the major themes of our Christian faith; as we encounter in this pilgrimage the features of our salvation; year by year we have the opportunity know them better. Candlemas is a significant turning point on the journey and, like all turning points, it holds both hope and fear, hope for new opportunities, and fears for what is being left behind.

There are of course many turning points, significant life events, in our lives as individuals, as communities, and as peoples; including both celebrations and wakes. Covid-19 will certainly turnout to be a turning point in all our lives, for all sorts of reasons. All sorts of changes that were happening anyway, but now they are happening much more quickly. It's disorientating and, let's be honest, frightening. What will the future hold for us, particularly as a church?

In the Christian year, we are perhaps more used to Advent Sunday being a turning point that we recognise, where a theme of the fulfilment of all things, swings back again to the beginning of the Christian story. We have managed make that quite a comfortable turning point; comforting ourselves with all the new light of Christmas after facing our fears of death and judgement. But let's not be too hard on ourselves. Fear does terrible things to human communities. We do need those comforts, and God understands this.

Human beings just can't cope with very much fear. Just look at what vaccine fears are doing to the European Community. Just look at what fears for the future have been doing to American politics. People turn to wild solutions, and vote for wild leaders, and get ensnared by wild conspiracy theories, and the consequences can get pretty ugly. People need comforts in their fears, and there is no dishonour in admitting such human weakness. Indeed the tragedies come when people run after false comforts.

So here we are, at Candlemas, in the midst of a pandemic, with all sorts of renewed hopes and fears, at one of the turning points of Christian year. We are being called to move on from celebrating the light of the world, and look towards the new life of Easter that this light came to bring. Candlemas is about turning from the assurance of new light, towards the promise of new life. It's time to take our leave from gazing at the wonderful new light, and turn to exploring what this new life can mean for us. You could say that this is one of the things that Lent is about.

When you have been staring at a bright light, your eyes are dazzled, and at first when you turn towards the darkness, it is even darker. But in a little time your eyes adjust, and you begin to see more. Jesus talked about the new life of Easter springing forth from the seed that had fallen into the darkness of the ground and become something new. Paradoxically, the darkness can often be the place where new life begins, even if it is not what we would choose.

## **ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH**

The turning point of Candlemas is both an invitation and a promise. It is an invitation to go deeper in our pilgrimage of faith, and to seek with greater purpose and courage that new life that the light came to bring. Unlike the turning point of Advent this is not about turning from our fears, but about facing them. But we are called to do so in the assurance that the light is still there, behind us, warming our backs, dazzling us no longer but lighting the way ahead.

Then, you will discover also that the promise and comfort and strength of all that new life in Christ is there too, despite the darkness that surrounds us.

CJ. 31.01.21