



# The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 29th January 2023  
The Feast of Candlemas  
Staying in Contact

The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

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or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

## Forthcoming Services

## Hymns

### **St Mary's, Bocking**

Sunday 29th January

8am Said Mass  
10am Sung Mass  
Wednesday 1st February  
9.30am Said Mass  
Sunday 5th February  
8am Said Mass  
10am Sung Mass

See  
*special  
booklet*

### **Panfield Church**

Sunday 29th January  
Tuesday 31st January  
Sunday 5th February

11am Holy Communion  
5pm Evening Prayer  
11am Holy Communion

## Gospel Acclamation

*The light to lighten the Gentiles,  
and to be the glory  
of your people Israel*

## NOTICES

**Gwen Nicholls** - We wanted to let you know in good time that Gwen's funeral will be at St Mary's on Thursday 2nd February at 11am. We hope many will join us as we give thanks for her life and faith.

**Lent Soup** - On Sunday February 26th following the main morning service there will be a Lent Soup in the Church Hall. Please can we encourage you to save the date. A sign up sheet so that we can gauge numbers will follow in a few weeks time, thank you.

**Quarterly Newsletter** - The second issue of our Newsletter needs to go to the printers by Monday 20th February. If you have ideas for content, or areas of church life we could include, please speak to, or email Fr Rod. We won't be able to include them all, but we can make sure to do so through the year.

**Junior Church** - Please let people know that through the first part of 2023, Junior Church will be running on the last Sunday of each month, so the forthcoming dates are January 29th, February 26th, March 26th and April 30th. Continuing and new members always welcome.

**Funeral** - Bernard Meech's funeral will take place on Tuesday 21st February 11.30am at Three Counties Crematorium. Jo and the family warmly invite you to join us them in celebrating Bernard's life.

**A Warm Place this Winter** - Every Friday until March 10th we will be opening St Mary's Church Hall from 11.30am to 2pm as a warm place. Along with being a friendly space, there will be refreshments and a simple soup lunch, all of which will be free. Why not bring a friend and come along yourself.

**Eco Church - Birdwatch!** - Everyone is welcome to join in the Annual RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch in St Mary's Churchyard. TODAY, meet at the churchyard gate 11.30am for one hour's feathery fun. potter guide supplied, just wear appropriate clothing. See Jacqui Hogger for more details.

**Quiz Night** - The Friends of St Mary's have arranged for a Quiz Night with Fish & Chip Supper on Saturday 4th March, 6.30 for 7pm in the Church Hall. Join us for a fantastic evening, with a £100 prize for the winning team! Tickets available from today only £12 including your food!

**Prayers** - We keep in our prayers Jean Goodwin, Sue, Jackie, Roger, Frances, Margaret, Peter, Jenifer, Jo, June Blackwood, and Margaret Everitt. We also remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Derrick Bugby, Adelaide Tyler, Reginald Parkinson, John Beynon and Gerald Bonner.

## The Collect for the Feast of Candlemas

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. Amen.

## ***Epistle Reading - Hebrews 2:14-end***

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

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

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 turtledoves 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 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 seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped 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.

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.

## Address

I think I first encountered Candlemas at the church in Chesterfield, Derbyshire which I attended in the late 1980s and early 1990s (and indeed was part of the ministry team for a short period of time). Although the church in Manchester that I attended as a teenager would have been regarded as 'High Church' I don't recall doing Candlemas. The Chesterfield church kept it as a major festival on the proper day (2nd February) with an evening Mass starting with a candlelit procession around the church. While I fully understand the rationale for celebrating major festivals on the nearest Sunday rather than on the proper date, I also think something is lost. I fear the day when the church celebrates 'Ash Wednesday Sunday' as the beginning of Lent!

But Candlemas, although having a clear Biblical rationale, has perhaps always been a bit controversial. It seems to have been largely abolished in the late 1540s when England was subjected to a radical Protestant regime under King Edward VI. The problem was not so much the underlying story as the possibility that candles, which had been blessed as part of the ceremony, might be regarded as having some sort of magical powers. Like many people these days I enjoy candles, though I would not want to go back to the times when they were the main source of illumination. I fully understand why people want to light a candle in memory of someone they have lost; or perhaps to mark a significant moment in their lives. I have certainly done so. But I do not imagine that lighting a candle will increase the likelihood of my Premium Bonds becoming lucky; or even that Manchester City will again rightly be Premier League champions (barring West Ham standing in their way).

So what is it that we are doing today? Even the Gospel reading from St Luke is a bit confusing. In the time of Jesus, there were three ceremonies subsequent to the birth of a male child. These were circumcision, usually on the eighth day and often associated with the naming of the child. In our modern liturgy we keep these on 1st January, a week after Christmas Day. Secondly there was an offering for the redemption of the first born son; and thirdly there was the purification of the mother forty days after the birth. Rituals, including sacrifices, were associated with each of these. St Luke's account seems to some extent to combine the second and third of these.

The details may not be that important. The focus today is on the words of Simeon, that the new born baby is to be 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel'. Here in a nutshell is the Gospel: the good news for all people. The God of the Jewish people (the Hebrews) is not only interested in his own people, in the way that some of the Gods in ancient times were, but is the God for everyone. This is a huge leap forward. The implication is that if there is a God, then there can only be one God; and that the only God is the one God whom Jesus acknowledged as his Father. All of us are therefore loved and cherished by Him and, because of that, are enabled to go out into His world both to proclaim his love and to live it out. Candlemas can be seen as the Gospel in miniature.

I could almost end there, though the sermon would then be too short (a sigh of relief perhaps!). But the liturgy for Candlemas has changed. My recollection is that many years ago, the Candlemas procession preceded the Mass. The liturgy now seems to suggest that it should take place at the end of the service and move towards the place of baptism. There is then a turning away from Christmas and towards Easter. These are of course the two great festivals of the Christian year. Traditionally baptisms took place at Easter. Candlemas is as much a looking forward as a looking back.

In the church's year we move soon into Lent with its theme of self examination, repentance and a determination to re-evaluate our lives and move forward. The Easter season begins in despair (the crucifixion) before embracing a new hope through the story of the resurrection. Tragedy and triumph are inextricably linked in the Christian story. Or at least that is how it seems. But are they really so different? Can we have the resurrection without the cross? Or even the birth without the trauma of the journey to Bethlehem and the search for a (less than) suitable birthplace? The shadow shade seems inextricably linked with the Christian story in a way that it does not in other religions.

And perhaps that is even true of the story of Candlemas. We assume that Simeon was old, though we don't know that. He had no known relationship to either Mary or Joseph, much less to Jesus. Yet he took the babe in his arms and blessed him. Should he not have been reported to Social Services as a potential danger to children? Should he not have been on a watch list as a possible abuser? In the 21st century might any of this have happened?

I suspect few of us even think about asking these questions. Yet had the story been written with a 21st century slant – 70 year old man snatches baby at Baptism and mutters incantations over her – I imagine the police would soon have been on the scene and poor old Simeon would have been in custody.

This is not to diminish the reality of child abuse in our own day. It is a serious and continuing issue. Nothing justifies it. It is, however, to suggest that we need to use both our eyes when looking at Biblical stories. We need both to be aware of what was acceptable two thousand years ago – and indeed might have been perceived as required by God; and to recognise that we cannot use Biblical stories to justify 21st century attitudes and behaviour.

I have often avoided Candelmas, especially if kept on a stormy winter evening following a difficult commute from the office. So it is good to keep it today. But perhaps the underlying story has darker implications than seems at first sight.

## Post Communion 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.