

Presentation of Christ of Christ in the Temple – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2026

Today's Bible Readings

**First Reading** Hebrews 2: 14-18

Jesus became like us, so that God understands what it means to be human. Because the Lord knows us, he is merciful towards all people and walks with us in our struggles.

**Gospel** Luke 2:22-40

Jesus is brought to the Temple by his parents for Mary's purification accordingly to the law, and Simeon recognises the child is God's Messiah. He speaks of salvation offered to all people but also foresees the suffering that is to follow, as the shadow of the Cross looms.

**HOMILY**     *"And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* (Luke 2:35)

On Wednesday this week, many of us celebrated the beginning of a new ministry, when Dame Sarah Mullally was officially confirmed as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, at a service in St Paul's Cathedral. She soon spoke about ending misogyny, and I for one am delighted the Holy Spirit has led the Church of England to this wonderful day, although I, like many catholic minded Christians I the early 1990's, struggled at first with the ordination of women to the priesthood. That long journey has required considerable patience and prayer, for all, especially women. And as our new Archbishop has acknowledged, sadly there is a long way still to go. The same is true for other struggles within the Church. Two weeks ago, The House of Bishops confirmed the end of the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process, which has engaged many of us in discussion relating to relationships, sexuality and marriage. Truth be told, LLF has not been a pleasant experience for all, not least the LGBTQI+ community, and the bishops have acknowledged that expectations have been raised and dashed, and that some feel hurt. In conclusion, they have stated that same-sex weddings or stand-alone same-sex blessings will not be permitted in CofE Churches, those with a call to ordained ministry who are already married to their same-sex partner will not be allowed to enter ordained ministry, and those clergy in a civil partnership cannot marry their same-sex partner.

Some have celebrated what they perceive as a halt to progressive or liberal ideas, an important halt for the sake of church unity (keeping conservatives onboard) while others lament the lack of progress and inclusivity as failure; with many left picking over the bones of LLF. An article in the Church Times this past week, by the Revd Dr John Prysor-Jones (a Psychotherapist) leapt out at me. He asserts that in Jesus' Gospel teaching he challenges the rule-based religion of his day as interpreted and enforced by a privileged power group of conservative leaders. Dr John goes onto suggest that *purity draws lines, holiness breaks bread*. For Jesus sits at table, to the consternation of the Pharisees and others, with those he meets throughout his ministry. The Lord includes, forgives, heals and loves as he searches for the lost and rejoices to find them. Jesus still does that today, and surely, so must we.

In today's Gospel, the aged Simeon waits for God to show him a sign. Patiently he looks for fulfilment, for sight of the Lord's Messiah. On seeing the child Jesus, he acclaims the baby as *'a light to enlighten the nations'* (Luke 2: 32). Anna also gives thanks to God and proclaims Jesus as her Redeemer, the one who saves. Traditionally, candles remind us that Jesus is the light that will illumine the path of life, the way that leads to wholeness and God the Father – the path of enlightenment, the path to heaven, for Jesus is the light of the world. Yet there is another pathway emerging from this Gospel. The celebrations of Epiphany are now complete, and our Crib will be dismantled tomorrow as the Christian year shifts gear from Christmas new life to Good Friday death. For just as we long to live in the light of Christ and the hope of heaven, we are faced with the realities of suffering and human struggle, of burdens to carry, of

disunity, exclusion and judgement – the agonising nails of the Cross. Perhaps to some it seems almost unreal, that we are already being reminded of the cross of Calvary, even now, as Jesus is presented in the temple. For our Lord's life is lived in the shadow of the cross, marked by sacrifice – it is at the heart of who he is, God incarnate, as recognised by the Magi who presented with him Myrr for the embalming of the royal dead at Epiphany. Now in the Temple, Simeon directs our thoughts towards the cross as he addresses Mary, saying: *"This child is destined for the falling and 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."* (Luke 2: 34,35)

The shadow of the cross falls on Jesus, a baby in arms of devout Simeon and that same shadow falls over Mary, his loving mother. Soon we will remember how she stood at the foot of the cross, 'the place of the skull,' when our Lord was crucified. Perhaps in that moment Mary recalled the words of Anna in the temple, who praised God, declaring Jesus as *'the one who brings redemption,'* (Luke 2: 38) There is purpose behind this suffering, as Jesus takes our failings upon his shoulders and dies. We believe he carries our burdens for us, if we are willing to let him do so, even to death upon a cross. Our Lord knows how we are tested, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, *"Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested"* (Hebrews 2: 18). We should look carefully at our Lord's life in the Gospels and the way he doesn't add to people's burdens, but rather he liberates them; he carries their load – and ours too. We, disciples today are called to sacrifice as we follow Christ our Lord to Calvary. The Church is also marked by the shadow of the cross. The bishops' open letter speaks of the pain and hurt felt by many, including within the LGBTQI community. Personally, I don't feel hurt – that's the wrong word. I simply feel a continuation of the discrimination that I have experienced all my life, because my sexuality, like yours, is not a lifestyle choice, it is who I am, made in God's image. Following Simeon's example, I continue to be patient and remain faithful to my call. Whatever our views, we are all called to do the same, as we live in the shadow of the cross, while ever longing for the new life that transforms, the light of Easter.

We each face challenges and struggles, we are all different – Simeon and Anna were just the same. Here, in this beautiful place of prayer and reconciliation at the heart of Weybridge, in our rich diversity, with all our imperfections and vulnerabilities (I for one have many), we stand before the Lord of life and love and seek to be the people God has made us to be, the very people God is calling us to be. This is a call to be reconciled to one another and to God, in love. To be in the presence of the Lord makes my heart sing for joy and to share that presence, the light to enlighten the nations, with you and with those outside the walls of this church is a privilege. I hope and pray you feel the same, as you are sent out from church to be a disciple, filled with hope and God's love.

The bishop's statement on the end of LLF does little to reassure LGBTQI+ Christians that they are included, and the church continues to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation, even if superficially the bishops suggest otherwise. But not so with Jesus, who knows and loves every one of us and longs for all to be united, in him, the light of the world, not least as we gather around the altar to break bread. That is the hope of redemption. That is what Simeon longed for and Anna encountered in the Temple. Indeed, Simeon showed life-long patience, and trusted God in faithfulness that in God's time that light would break into his world anew, and it did. I hope we will all pray for Archbishop Sarah as she must navigate the challenging road ahead, trying to maintain unity while also applying scripture, reason and tradition in an enlightened world, with Christ's all-encompassing love for all – not an easy task. And I pray that in time, all may be truly included, valued and loved for who they are, made in the image of God, women and men in all our diversity. But that will only happen if Christians are willing to live for Jesus first, to move from tribal purity, which draws lines of discrimination and exclusion; to holiness, which includes and loves and breaks bread. Amen.

*Father Damian Harrison-Miles, February 2026.*