

Waiting!

Malachi 3¹⁻⁵; Psalm 24; Hebrews 2^{14-end}; Luke 2²²⁻⁴⁰

And a sword will pierce your own soul too. [Luke 2³⁵]

This pivotal Sunday, The Feast of the Presentation (or Candlemass), was one of the thrilling discoveries when I dried out as a Baptist and became an Anglican: it wasn't something I had experienced before and I came to understand why 'proper' priests like to retire on this celebration as it ends so poignantly with the *Nunc Dimittis*, *Lord let you servant now go in peace!*

It is pivotal because on this Sunday we deliberately and consciously turn away from the celebration of the Incarnation and, in preparing for Lent, begin to focus on the cross and the Passion. Who knows what Lent and Holy Week and Easter will look like this year!

There is so much about this Festival that is about waiting:

- ✘ Simeon has always known that this will be a bitter-sweet moment: **it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.** So, **guided by the Spirit** he is now in the right place at the right time to meet with Jesus. How long did he have to wait? We don't know. What we do know, because **the Holy Spirit rested on him**, was that he recognised that in this 8-day-old infant was the fullest fulfilment of God's promises.

You remember that two weeks ago I challenged you to spend time with God and here, in Simeon, we see what can happen: he heard the **Spirit** and then responded to the **Spirit's** promptings – and it is with joy that he lets go of what he knows to take hold of what God has for him: **my eyes have seen your salvation!**

- ✘ Anna is the sort of woman of whom I am in awe. I am not aware of so many today, but there were woman like her that I was aware of in my youth and when I first started working in the Church. These widows almost let go of this life and were holding onto God in a way in which nothing else mattered – and they have always been powerhouses of prayer. She was probably at the end of her teens when she embraced this life of prayer and had likely been in the Temple for 65 years. She hadn't had the same promise as Simeon, but I, for

one, would trust her spiritual judgement.

How many of us have the patience to wait until it is God's time to change things? Perhaps this is a particular challenge for those who are housebound, that they become the prayer-warriors who use the gift of their limitations in a positive employment – the job is there to be done!

- ✘ Jesus will wait – we don't hear about him until he is 12 and then not again until he is 30. Luke, the diligent historian, only says, **the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.** I don't know about you, but I have so many questions about how aware Jesus was of his identity and how he coped with being God and a boy all at the same time?

We all have to grow into the work that God has for us and to learn whatever lessons he has for us along the way. I wouldn't be who I am and able to fulfil my calling without the path that led here, however much I might have wanted to short-circuit some of it. The same is true for you too!

- ✘ Mary must wait too. She has given birth and knows the promise and potential for her Son and so Simeon's words, **a sword will pierce your own soul too**, must have been a reality check for her: it may not have been what she thought would await the mother of the Messiah, the Mother of God.

These are the words that turn us to look to what is to come. Are these the words that came to her mind when she stood at the cross and wondered what had come of the promise of Gabriel, **nothing will be impossible with God!** How hard it can be to resist the temptation to doubt when we have to wait to see in reality what faith knows to be true.

I could be flippant and point out the obvious – I shall have to wait for a bit yet before I get my turn of singing the *Nunc Dimittis* before I hang my collar up: for that I am glad! I could also point out something else that is obvious – we have to wait until it is safe to be together again!

From the people we have met in the readings today, waiting isn't the same as doing nothing – they may not have had all the details of what they were waiting for but trusted God they would know it: Simeon looked for the prompt; Anna prayed; Jesus prepared; and Mary continued with her task in mothering Jesus. None complained and no-one gave up! Our challenge is to make waiting positive until God makes know what is next!