

## Candlemas

### Call to Worship

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.

And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good. *(NIV)*

### Link 1

Candlemas. The festival of Holy Light – the One Light of Creation, of Redemption, the one Light that is the Light of all mankind, that shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.

That is what we are celebrating today.

Our first hymn welcomes that light; it was written by a German, Rhabanus Maurus, somewhere around twelve hundred years ago. Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire.

### Hymn StF 373 – Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,  
and lighten with celestial fire;  
thou the anointing Spirit art,  
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

Thy blessèd unction from above  
is comfort, life, and fire of love;  
enable with perpetual light  
the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soilèd face  
with the abundance of thy grace;  
keep far our foes, give peace at home;  
where thou art guide no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,  
and thee, of both, to be but One;  
that through the ages all along  
this may be our endless song:

'Praise to thy eternal merit,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.'

### Link 2

Let us continue to approach our God – first with a prayer from the Methodist Worship Book, and then a creed – again from mediaeval Germany. Then we shall join in saying the Lord's Prayer together – in whatever version, in whatever language, in whatever form is closest to our hearts.

### Prayer

#### Adoration

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Giver of Life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; at the opening of this day you call us out of darkness into your marvellous light; Blessed are you for ever and ever. Amen.

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## ***And a Creed – based on a poem by Heinrich Frauenlob c1290***

I believe in God

I believe in the Father-Mother, Only Source and Only Maker – the Mother-Father who gives me and all of creation both purpose and freedom.

I believe in Jesus Christ, Only Son and Only Wisdom – the Jesus Christ who is the eternal Word, yet was born, died and risen for me and for all.

I believe in the Spirit, Only Life and Only Power – the Spirit who speaks in the heart and who gives life to all of creation

I believe in the One God.

## ***Our Father***

*And we say together the prayer Jesus taught us in whatever language or version is nearest to our hearts.*

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name: thy kingdom come: thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever;  
AMEN.

## **Talk A – Candlemas**

I suppose it's a bit late, but welcome – welcome to our Gloucestershire Circuit's prerecorded service, welcome whoever you are, welcome wherever you are, welcome whenever you are. This service is meant for the 31st of January – the Sunday nearest to Candlemas, when Jesus was brought into the Temple, in accordance with the Law given to Moses, whereby every firstborn male was given to God, and then bought back, redeemed, by giving God a pair of doves in payment.

But of course you may be watching it on a totally different day. That doesn't matter, days, times, seasons don't matter in themselves; what matters is the truth they keep in mind: that Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, was himself redeemed; that the Light of the World had to be brought into the Temple so that the Dove, the Dove of Peace, the Holy Spirit, could be brought there too.

And the Temple – all through the Bible the Temple is a double image: of the whole of Creation, and of the individual soul. And that applies here too: God's Light has come into the Temple, and is shining there – God's Light has come into the World, and is shining here – God's Light has come into our hearts and is shining there – I hope?

But let us remind ourselves of Luke's account of this event.

## **Reading: Luke 2:22-24**

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons'. (NIV)

## **Link 3**

Yes, it's not just about what God does, about God's light – it's about how we respond to that light. So now let us join the Northern Baptist Association in singing one of Charles Wesley's greatest hymns, one that is exactly about God's light and our response – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood

## Hymn StF 345 – And can it be

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain? For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left his Father's throne above— So free, so infinite his grace—  
Emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free; For, O my God, it found out me!

No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies! Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore, let angel minds enquire no more.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray— I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

## Link 4

The dungeon flamed with the Light that is Jesus Christ! And such a light must have consequences, not only for us but for the whole world. And Luke's Gospel goes on to expound that!

## Reading: Luke 2:25-35

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.'

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.' (NIV)

## Talk B – Simeon

Prepared in the sight of all nations! This coming of Jesus isn't just a personal thing; it's not just about us, about our personal safety and salvation – it's about the whole world; it is a new light that reveals things to the people we don't know; to the people we think of as outside, outside our country, outside the church, outside our circle of friends and of people "like us". This is a light that shines not only on pleasant gardens and country churches, but also on bomb craters, on barbed wire, on food banks, on demolished statues, on used syringes, on exhausted nurses, on trade warfare, on gang warfare, on fake adverts, on

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political corruption, on all that makes our world, our country, our community, what it truly is.

And if the light is shining, and we open our eyes, how can we not pray for these things? So that is what we shall do now.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

We step into your light, Lord, and we see ourselves

We see our hopes, our dreams, our fears, our faults, our guilt, our failures, our regrets, our joys, our memories, our selves.

We acknowledge your vision for ourselves, trusting in your grace to give us what we truly need, and to fulfil what we truly can become.

Your light shines in the darkness

#### **And the darkness can never overcome it**

But your light shines further than just on us. Looking around, we see your light fall on our neighbours, on their needs, on their pains, on their wants.

We share in their pain, and in your light we can see how to help, how to support, how to ask for your grace for them – and how to accept their help and support for us

The light shines in the darkness

#### **And the darkness can never overcome it**

The light shines further than that. We see our village, our town, our suburb, our county, the churches and schools and shops, the businesses, the factories, and further still, the whole country; on the people with influence and the institutions with power: financial power, governmental power, power of information.

We acknowledge our share in that power and influence, and look to exercise it in your light, so that your light may be seen ever more clearly by those around us.

The light shines in the darkness

#### **And the darkness can never overcome it**

Your light shines on the whole world. Wrecked by typhoon and earthquake, flood and drought; ruined more deeply by war, hatred, oppression and pride, by the lust for power and the desire for property.

We are part of your whole world, Lord. May we and all your people seek to walk in the light we see, and reject the darkness of our hearts.

The light shines in the darkness

#### **And the darkness can never overcome it**

Your light shines without limit, unconquered by darkness. It shows us worlds beyond worlds, eternities beyond time, life beyond death and unconquered by death.

We thank you for all those who have gone before us into that light, and especially those who revealed something of your love and your life, for us and for all the world, who helped us to own you as Lord, and to walk in your light for ever, through the ages of ages, worlds without end.

Your light shines in the darkness

#### **And the darkness can never overcome it**

**Amen**

### **Link 5**

Amen. But Candlemas isn't just about other people – there is a direct challenge to us too. And that is how Luke finishes the story.

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## Reading: Luke 2:36-38

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (NIV)

## Talk C – Anna

The Light has shone on us – is shining in our hearts, and we have opened our eyes to it – haven't we? Haven't we known how that Light has shown us not only what is wrong in us, but has shown us the way forward, celebrated what is good in us, given us the confidence to stride out towards the greatest of all Lights!

*And shall I slight my Father's love? Or basely fear his gifts to own? Unmindful of his favours prove? Shall I, the hallowed cross to shun, Refuse his righteousness to impart By hiding it within my heart?*

No! We want to bring other people into that Light as well, to light their way, to share with them the truth, the life, the glory that we have! How can we do otherwise, if that light is truly shining in us – shining through us – shining from us to all around us?

Or have we truly opened our eyes?

Either way, let us renew our faith in that light and our commitment to that light.

## Closing Prayers

The Father of lights, with whom is no shadow of turning, has given us birth through the word of truth

**Father, help me to shine the light of truth for all I meet, honoured and rejected, wise and foolish, rich and poor, loving and unloving, just as you shine even on me.**

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Let your light shine!"

**Jesus, shine the light of your love through me, when I meet you hungry, thirsty, cold, immigrant, sick, guilty – when I meet you in the least of these your little ones – and Jesus, shine even for me.**

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

**Holy Spirit, bring your freedom to the captive, your sight to the blind, your mercy to the broken-hearted, your good news to the poor, your light to my darkness.**

Amen

## Link 6

And let us close, therefore, with a song of commitment: the breastplate of the little blind kid:  
Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.

## Hymn StF 545 – Be thou my vision

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;  
Thou my best thought by day or by night,  
Waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

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Be Thou my Wisdom, Thou my true Word,  
I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord;  
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son;  
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my battle-shield, sword for the fight;  
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight;  
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower:  
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:  
Thou mine inheritance now and always;  
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart:  
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, after victory won  
May I reach heaven's joys O bright heaven's Son!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;  
Thou my best thought by day or by night,  
Waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

### Close

*And to close, a few words from St Paul:*

What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. (NIV)

*Let us say together the words of the Grace:*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore AMEN

Thank you for joining in worship with us. We hope it will help you, just as it has helped us, to know that we are together, and that we are not forgotten, not separated, not split apart, but that we are all one in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Saviour.

Thank you again, and goodbye. Till the next time!