

Dear friends,

The Epiphany season reaches its climax next Sunday with the feast of the presentation of Christ in the Temple, a day also known as “the purification of Mary” or more colloquially as “Candlemas” because in days of yore churches used to bless all the candles they were going to use that year on this day.

Then follows a few weeks of ordinary time before Ash Wednesday on 2nd March. As we have a BCP Eucharist on Wednesdays anyway we have taken to designating this service as our Ash Wednesday service for the whole mission community. That evening we will start our seven-week Diocesan Lent course called “Surprised by generosity”.

## Covid rules

As you will be aware, all plan B restrictions cease from tomorrow so there are no longer any legal restrictions in place and masks no longer have to be worn in church from this Sunday unless you want to of course.

## 30th January – The presentation of Christ (Candlemas)

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter’s, Rev. Margaret Scrivener will be presiding at All Saints at 9.30 and Rev. Chris Cant will preside at St. Michael’s at 11.am.

**Malachi 3: 1-5.** The pairing of this lection with the presentation of Christ has its difficulties but nevertheless the messenger or “angel” (the word is the same in Hebrew) of the covenant will visit the Temple and bring in his wake a purifying new broom that will start by refining and re-ordering the worship of the Temple and then move to the social sphere and start to reorder unjust social structures. The prophets were always adamant that an acceptable religious cult must go hand in hand with working for social justice.

**Hebrews 2: 14 – 18.** As I preached last week about being set free from the fear of death, the reason for our confidence is made clear here. If Jesus wasn’t a fully flesh and blood human, his resurrection would mean very little to any of us personally but human flesh and blood was raised on the third day, flesh and blood just like yours and mine. Resurrection is not reserved for demi-Gods, it is for all matter.

**Luke 2: 22-40.** Luke appears to have confused two different requirements of the law – the purification of Mary (similar to the old “churching of women” if you have long memories) and the presentation of a first born male that requires no sacrifice. No matter, Luke was not Jewish so that is understandable. What is significant is that Jesus is recognised by two old sages, Simeon and Anna representing “old Israel”, as the long-expected Messiah who would be responsible for the falling and rising of many in Israel (as prophesied in Malachi). Mary’s personal torment at seeing her son tortured and executed is also alluded to as a sword piercing her heart.

## **A Seat at the table: engaging church members with science**

**Wednesday 9th February**

**Refreshments from 7 pm, meeting starts at 7.30 pm.**

**St Peter’s Church, The Lawn,  
Budleigh Salterton. EX9 6LT**

You are invited to a meeting to learn more about how you can engage with science in Devon. Speakers from Exeter University will tell you about some of the research going on at Exeter University and what opportunities there are to get involved in the design and delivery of research projects. Your views on research are always welcome!

Everyone is welcome. We are advertising in churches around Devon but feel free to invite friends who don’t come to church.

**On the 12th February**, as already trailed, we are inviting RMC people to a day of prayer and discernment that will take place at All Saints church in Sidmouth from 10am -4pm, the aim of which is to engender a sense of unity and purpose. Thank you to everyone who has offered to help in the kitchen with teas and coffees. People should take a packed lunch. Louise and I have been to Sidmouth to see the lay of the land. Parking is available next

to the church and the church has been offered to us free of charge but I think it only right to collect a retiring donation for them to say thank you!

**In a lovely development** I had a lovely meeting with Canon Mike Williams on Monday where he has agreed to come on board and join our wonderful band of retired priests who help out in the RMC from April. Many will remember Mike with affection from before he was whisked away to work at the cathedral, and we welcome him back with open arms.

## Thought for the day

The difference between the atmosphere just a few weeks ago and now is extraordinary. The Omicron variant was filling everyone with dread and more restrictions were introduced. A few short weeks later and the dire predictions made by “Sage” have proved unfounded and the government proved right to resist imposing even more draconian measures. The mood in the church seems to be lighter as well. Things seem to have gone into overdrive all of a sudden with a flurry of wedding bookings, and events coming thick and fast. As I write, bookings for our new year quiz and fish and chip supper this Saturday in the Peter Hall are currently going like hot chips! Otterton church, riding a wave of recent new members saw its largest congregation (outside of baptisms and special events) since I arrived four years ago last Sunday. Attendance at the Wednesday morning communion service at St. Peter’s reached a new high last week as well. Growth and new shoots are a sign that Spring is almost upon us and is a sign that whatever we are doing we are doing something right. And it has happened without any five-year plans or conscious pushing for growth. Green shoots are happening because we are faithful, worshipful, prayerful and offer a consistent worship pattern that ministers to our faithful people that didn’t buckle under Covid or any difficult personnel challenges we may have faced but we ploughed through regardless offering a high-quality diet of reverent word and sacrament in the Anglican tradition.

Much derided and often dismissed, we can hold our heads high and walk confidently so it is in this frame of mind that I commend our spiritual “away day” to you on February 12th, a time to take stock and be grateful for what we are and look to try and perceive what God may be trying to prod us to get involved with next. May we find a renewed sense of unity and purpose and just notice what God is doing and saying and build on it and make it stronger.

# The prayer for Today

**God our Father  
Source of unity and love,  
Make your faithful people one in heart and mind  
That your church may live in harmony,  
Be steadfast in its profession of faith  
And secure in unity**

Love and peace,  
Martin