

Dear friends,

The services at All Saints and St. Michael's went in very similar ways of course because I took the services – but at Otterton there were three children and also the presence of a six-week-old baby! Perhaps not unusual in urban or city churches, but in a small rural church quite an event. And in fact, quite appropriate for the festival we were celebrating which while ostensibly the “presentation of Christ in the Temple” was also the “Purification” of Mary after childbirth. This practice (no longer used nowadays) survived into the modern era and was called the “churching” of women. There was one lady in the congregation who remembers being “churched” which had by then morphed from being anything to do with ritual purity and was more to do with thanksgiving for the gift of a child. Well, we were very thankful for the presence of little Freddie.

Apologies for preparing you for the 4th of Epiphany rather than the “Presentation” last Wednesday. The presentation is actually on the 2nd February (A Friday) and can be transferred either forwards or backwards and I hadn't noticed we had transferred it to the 28th January! Having prepared for one I suddenly had to do it all over again for the pew sheet and write a different sermon!

Sunday 4th February – 2nd before Lent

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's and Reverend Jean Burrows will preside at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael's at 11.00am.

Proverbs 8: 1,22-31. Wisdom has always been thought of as a divine attribute and in the Bible is referred to in female terms (in both Greek and Hebrew). Here in proverbs “Lady Wisdom” tells how she was with God at the dawn of creation and delighted in all the Father made – especially human beings.

Colossians 1: 15-20. A stupendous piece of writing that places Christ at the dawn of creation and also as the one in whom all creation will find its salvation. Christ is the beginning and the end – the Alpha and the Omega

John 1: 1-14. This important piece that we habitually say at Christmas, celebrating the eternal word made flesh is included today, because like the other two readings it places Christ at the very dawn of creation and also because the word “Logos” which we

normally translate as “word” as in “the word made flesh” also has a deeper philosophical meaning akin to wisdom and reason. Hence you see why it marries up with our first reading from Proverbs. As well as being known as the word made flesh it is also theologically possible to refer to Jesus Christ as the “wisdom made flesh”.

Thought for the day.

Pictured above are our first two daffodils that have appeared in our garden. It is amazing that even though they are mown flat every year and apparently dead and gone they arise every spring to remind us of the power of the regenerative power of nature, which is also the power of the resurrection. The resurrection was not a one-off aberration that happened to one man two thousand years ago but is written into the fabric of the universe. True resurrection can be experienced in the midst of our mortal lives as well, not just something that we await after our deaths. This widening of our understanding of the power and purposes of God makes the Spirit of God more powerful and expected when it is lifted from dusty theological books and applied to everyday life.

We all get down, me included, and we feel sometimes like the darkness closing in around us. Seeing the first daffs of spring is akin to “seeing salvation”. It reminds us that rather than just a cycle of birth and death, for Christians it is a matter of birth and death and new birth. I was feeling very down before I sat down to write this “thought” so Louise went out and took this picture to remind me that my private fears and lows are not the whole of reality – even though they feel they are when they surge around you. One of the greatest lessons of Buddhism that I take from that tradition is that “You are not your thoughts”. You and existence are much greater than them. Sometimes we all just need to be reminded of that fact.

The Prayer for Today was written by Howard Booth

Healing power of Jesus Christ

Fall afresh on me,

Healing power of Jesus Christ,

Fall afresh on me.

Touch me, stir me, unfold me, love me,

Healing power of Jesus Christ

Fall afresh on me.

Love and peace,
Martin