

Dear friends,

For the church, the Christmas/Epiphany season finally came to an end last Sunday with the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, otherwise known as Candlemas. As I said on Sunday the presentation marks a kind of watershed, where we finish marking the incarnation and turn and start looking towards the cross. We have a couple of weeks of “ordinary time” before Ash Wednesday on the 18th February marks the start of Lent.

We'll be using up some holiday time owed before I leave and travelling to India for a tour of the foothills of the Himalayas and Amritsar before flying to the Southeast (Chennai) to see Rob and Rashpal, my brother and sister-in-laws.

We continue to chip away at the mountains of junk we all accumulate over time. As I've said before, it is a strangely cathartic experience throwing up some delightful almost forgotten surprises. I used to make up stories to tell my daughter Claire when she was very young – Nancy the pirate I remember distinctly but another one was the adventures of three naughty little squirrels – Cyril, Nutsy and Celie. It obviously captured her imagination because I found a cardboard comic book that we'd made– stapled and illustrated – and titled “Daddy buys a windsurfer”. Perhaps a new career in children's literature beckons?

At Choral Evensong on Sunday Evening we are delighted that we will be joined by Rev. Lewis Eden and the choir from Woodberry. Lewis will lead the prayers.

Sunday 8th February – 2 before Lent.

Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at both morning services at St. Peter's and I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively. I will also preside at Choral Evensong at 6pm.

Genesis 1:1 – 2: 3. A very long (sorry George) reading of the first Biblical creation story. The prime themes are that God is a creator God, that the creation is good and that humankind is the pinnacle of the creative process.

Romans 8: 18-25. Paul is clear that the whole creation is going to be redeemed because God is a creating, forgiving and redeeming God and although we may be the pinnacle of creation, we are still a creation as much as the grain of sand or a flower, a mountain or the sea.

Matthew 6: 25-34. Jesus invites his disciples to show faith in God by putting his kingdom and its values as the highest of attainments to be sought. Everything else, clothes, food, or how long will I live are secondary issues – important in their own way but still secondary. Worries and troubles are a part of life, but they mustn't distract you from what is really important in life.

Thought for the Day.

That God is in and through all creation is very important to the Christian faith and its Sacraments. It means that God can “speak” through creation. Who hasn’t gazed at a beautiful mountain scape or at a rough sea, a starry night sky or a tranquil lake and “lost” themselves or felt strangely at one with the scene instead of outside it. That is what some would call a spiritual moment. So would I and further I’d call it a natural sacrament where God is felt.

This sense that God is present in all created matter and that the material can be a bearer of the spiritual is what underpins all the sacraments of the church. I’m sure at some point we learnt that a sacrament was an outward sign of an inner Grace. That means that ordinary physical things can truly convey spiritual reality if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. The water of baptism, anointing with the oil of healing, the bread and wine in the Eucharist are all perceived differently. In my view, they are not just symbolic, but they are really and truly conveying the reality of God. That is the difference between a symbol and a sacrament. A dividing line in churchmanship is the question of whether one believes in the Real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I do, for the reasons I’ve outlined above in brief. If you don’t believe in the real presence of Christ, the obvious conclusion is that you must believe in the real absence of Christ in the Eucharist which is something too awful to contemplate and would empty the church and its practices of any meaning. It is why I especially love the opening words of the Eucharistic prayer that we are currently using: The Lord is here – His Spirit is with us.

The Prayer for Today are the final words of one of the least read books of the Bible, Jude. Verses 24 and 25.

**Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling
And to make you stand without blemish
In the presence of his glory with rejoicing,
To the only God our Saviour,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Be glory, majesty, power and authority,
Before all time and now and forever,
Amen.**

Love and peace,

Martin