

South Woodham Ferrers, 24 January 2021 – Virtual Service

<https://youtu.be/7wfgTI1lsMQ>

Call to Worship: Psalm 24 verses 7-10

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah

[New International Version]

So let us lift up our heads and let our hearts be lifted as we reflect upon the God in His Kingdom.

Let us give praise to the Lord of the Covenant with heart and soul and voice.

Hymn 1: “Praise, my Soul, the King of Heaven” <https://youtu.be/GyRIVbdsi4c>

Opening Prayers

Father God,

We come to You in gratitude that You saw our plight and reached out to us. May we come to understand more about You through fresh reflection on Your Word and its meaning for our lives today. Shine Your light to illuminate Your Word before us.

In the precious Name of Christ our Saviour,

Amen

Brief Introduction: Over long months now, we have lived through challenging days which have seemed at times to be unending. But as the New Year begins and a new chapter in this epic tale opens, we now able to look to the future with at least a measure of confidence and hope that our lives will return to some sort of “normal”. Some will already have received the vaccine, others will be waiting their turn and we will all be praying for the safe vaccination of those dearest to us. That day when we can at least give our loves ones a hug is, hopefully, getting nearer every day.

As we look to the future, therefore, I am looking a little forward in the Church calendar for our Gospel reading, to “The Presentation of the Lord”.

Reading: Luke 2: 22-40

Hymn 2: “Faithful One (So Unchanging)” <https://youtu.be/HROSwkRwpPI>

Reflection: These events happened many years ago when Jesus was still a baby. The Jewish people have long been waiting for the promised Messiah, the one who would lead them to victory and back to freedom from the captivity they endured for so long. No-one knew what to expect, but few would have expected a baby born in a dirty stable rather than a great palace.

Strange comparisons seem to arise when a baby is presented among us. Some will recognise the father’s ears or the mother’s eyes, the father’s chin or the mother’s smile, dad’s long legs or mum’s long fingers – ooh that one’s going to be a pianist one day. Some will say the child is like their dad others will claim a greater likeness to their mum; or is it, like all babies, more like Winston Churchill? My own mother’s take on such comparisons is to remark “No, he/she is just like himself/herself.”.

At the presentation in the temple, however, Simeon reflected on a promise from God that he would see the Lord's Messiah within his own lifetime and, as he took the infant Jesus in his arms to bless him, he saw the face of the promised Saviour looking up at him and told everyone who this child would become and what He would mean for the nations. Anna, the prophet, also came to them praising God for the Child and prophesying about the Christ child. Both saw the Light of the World, the Light that would overcome the darkness.

In the last year, we've faced days of growing darkness in which we have had brief periods of hope seemingly snatched by the next dark cloud to pass over us. But at last we seem to be entering a period of real hope as the vaccination programme gathers pace and infection rate seem to be coming down all be it gradually. That's not to say that the virus is beaten, but the vaccine along with continued responsible actions can help get this enemy back under control.

Simeon does not say "This means we're in the clear – behave how you wish, we've got a 'Get Out of Jail' card". Instead he declares that the child will shine a light into our hearts "so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed", reminding us that our own thoughts and actions still matter and that our ways may need changing. Just as the vaccine does not mean everything can automatically revert to the old normal and that we must still act responsibly to protect each other and care-workers on the frontline, so the gift of salvation in Christ does not absolve us of responsibility for our actions in life.

Both Simeon and Anna, however, proclaim the fulfilment of the hope for which they, along with the whole Jewish nation, had longed – the Light to lead them out of darkness. As he gazed upon the infant Jesus, Simeon's face reflected the glory of God. Now we, as Children of the Light, should reflect Christ and what He stands for in our lives and through our actions.

Closing Prayer:

Loving Lord,

You have held us and protected us through long periods of darkness. Now as we see a light at the end of this tunnel, help us to remember those things which have kept us safe through the darkness. Let us continue to hold each other in our hearts, ever reminding us to put others ahead of ourselves as we move forward together.

In His gracious Name, Amen.

Hymn 3: "Christ be our Light" <https://youtu.be/7Y5N6oxIKH0>

Blessing : May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
The rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

This little light of mine https://youtu.be/1yUKOS_cEXY