

Moving on? [Hebrews 2:14-18](#) [Luke 2:22-40](#)

Journeying is a key image of the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany. We journey to the crib in company with Mary and Joseph; the anxious, excited, chaotic journey of the expectant parents. We come with the shepherds, drawn from the hillside in response to the song of the angels. We travel with the Magi, with their sense of anticipation and stateliness, following the star to rest at the feet of the infant Jesus and propelled home, rejoicing.

After the rush of these journeys, we go with Mary and Joseph as they make their way to the Temple, obediently presenting their firstborn son. In this part of the journey, there are no angel voices carolling overhead, and no foreign travellers with mysterious gifts. The earthy ordinariness of the scene is striking. Mary is completing her ritual of purification forty days after giving birth, as all Jewish women would do. The couple are too poor to afford a lamb as the redemption sacrifice for their firstborn son, and come with two pigeons instead; the best that they could manage. It is a humble scene of life which countless couples would have experienced.

The elderly people who Mary and Joseph encounter as they come to the Temple would, in one way, be just part of the mixed crowd of folk who always gathered there, praying for a time when the prophecies for the coming Messiah would be fulfilled, devoting their lives to God. You can imagine that they would have looked longingly at each young male infant whose parents came to the Temple in the hope that this might be him.

Yet this is not simply another day, another gathering of people at the Temple, another ritual. Yet again, we see the things of earth being woven with the things of heaven. Simeon's own destiny as a mortal being is suffused with the joy of knowing that "my eyes have seen your salvation"; God's promise has been fulfilled in the coming of this child, a promise which will be both for the Gentiles and for Jews alike. Jesus is the promise of both light and glory. The eighty-four year-old prophetess Anna had been a constant presence in the Temple for decades, and now her prophecy moves from foretelling to forth-telling the news of the Messiah: "she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."

Their own lives are moving to a new stage, where they can leave their earthly lives knowing that what they have been longing for has come to pass. Jesus, the Messiah, the promise of salvation to all nations, has been fulfilled.



We can only imagine how the baby boy's parents might have felt as they heard these two wise, godly people's words and seen the joy written on their faces as they embraced Jesus. If they had had any doubts that this child really was the Son of God, Anna and Simeon's responses would have cast them away. What new things await? What a journey to come!

Yet the journey is not one of unalloyed joy and jubilation. Simeon's blessing comes with a word to Mary which shows that the way ahead is one of pain: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." The revelation of the Son's glory, which was seen by the shepherds and the wise men as they worshipped at the baby's manger-crib, moves to a revelation of suffering: the shadow of the cross moving across the face of the child as he grows up, the pain of a mother losing her first-born son.

This time of Candlemas reminds us that we are called to follow this journey from the crib to the cross. We are at a fresh point of departure as we begin to look towards the forty days of Lent. We are reminded that our life of faith is not always easy; there is pain and suffering along the way. But we believe in the resurrection promises of Jesus, knowing that he has shared our humanity, "fully human in every way", and has broken the power of death. He is our light, our hope and our help. He is with us every step of the way.

Revd Vicky Barrett

The Collect for Candlemas

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and glory of Israel:
make your home among us,
and present us pure and holy
to your heavenly Father,
your God, and our God.

Amen