



The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany 2nd January 2025 Candlemas

In the name of the + Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

HYMN

1 The Church of God a kingdom is,
where Christ in power doth reign;
where spirits yearn till, seen in bliss,
their Lord shall come again.

2 Glad companies of saints possess
this Church below, above;
and God's perpetual calm doth bless
their paradise of love.

3 An altar stands within the shrine
whereon, once sacrificed,
is set, immaculate, divine,
the Lamb of God, the Christ

4 There rich and poor, from countless lands,
praise God on mystic rood;
there nations reach forth holy hands
to take God's holy food.

5 There pure life-giving streams o'erflow
the sower's garden-ground;
and faith and hope fair blossoms show,
and fruits of love abound.

6 O King, O Christ, this endless grace
to all your people bring,
to see the vision of your face
in joy, O Christ, our King.

Introduction to confession

Hear the words of our Saviour Jesus Christ:
'I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me shall never walk in darkness
but shall have the light of life.'
Let us therefore bring our sins into his light
and confess them in penitence and faith

Lord Jesus, illuminate the darkness in our hearts:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, open our eyes to your saving love:
Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, unstop our ears to hear your living word:
Lord, have mercy.

May the God of all healing and forgiveness
draw you to himself and cleanse you from all your sins, +
that you may behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Absolution

The Collect for the fourth Sunday of Epiphany

O GOD, who knowest us to be set
in the midst of so many and great dangers,
that by reason of the frailty of our nature
we cannot always stand upright:
Grant to us such strength and protection,
as may support us in all dangers,
and carry us through all temptations;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A Reading from The Old Testament Malachi 3. 1-5

3 "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, 4 and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

5 "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 24

1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
2 for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.
3 Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?
4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.[\[a\]](#)
5 They will receive blessing from the Lord
and vindication from God their Savior.
6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, God of Jacob.[\[b\]](#)[\[c\]](#)
7 Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
8 Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.
9 Lift up your heads, you gates;

lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory.

**A Reading from the New Testament
Hebrews 2. 14-end**

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

HYMN

Songs of thankfulness and praise,
Jesus, Lord, to thee we raise,
manifested by the star
to the sages from afar;
branch of royal David's stem
in thy birth at Bethlehem;
anthems be to thee addressed,
God in man made manifest.

Manifest in making whole
palsied limbs and fainting soul;
manifest in valiant fight,
quelling all the devil's might;
manifest in gracious will,
ever bringing good from ill;
anthems be to thee addressed,
God in man made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream,
Prophet, Priest and King supreme;
and at Cana, wedding guest,
in thy Godhead manifest;
manifest in power divine,
changing water into wine;
anthems be to thee addressed,
God in man made manifest.

Sun and moon shall darkened be,
stars shall fall, the heavens shall flee;
Christ will then like lightning shine,
all will see his glorious sign;
all will then the trumpet hear,
all will see the Judge appear;
thou by all wilt be confessed,
God in man made manifest.

Grant us grace to see thee, Lord,
mirrored in thy holy Word;
may we imitate thee now,
and be pure, as pure art thou;
that we like to thee may be
at thy great Epiphany;
and may praise thee, ever blest,
God in man made manifest.

Alleluia Today the Lord is presented in the Temple
in substance of our mortal nature.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,
31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Reflection

The set Collect for this Sunday in Common Worship reflects the Presentation of Christ, but I have chosen to use the Book of Common Prayer Collect for this Sunday as it is one which I find particularly helpful. It also links with the Feast of Candlemas in that in the presentation of this child, we enter the mystery of the humanity/divinity of Jesus. As the reading from Hebrews has it, *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.* Tempted, tried, tested – all this Jesus knew as we know – thus he is able to help us. So to the Collect:

O GOD, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

'That by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright' ...

Life is difficult - very often - ranging from irritating frustrations to long term stressful circumstances, acute situations and times of limitations or hardship. We all have the STUFF of life and none of us escapes it.

But this prayer firstly speaks of God knowing us. Indeed, this thought runs throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament we read that we are known before we are formed in the womb, every word we speak every day of our lives is known to God. And Jesus, in teaching us not to fear, reminds us that even every hair on our head being numbered – so closely does God the Father regard us.

But have you noticed how sometimes, if not often, we are quite double minded in our thinking about God? We can think of God's presence in all creation and his complete knowledge of all things including us - and at the same time we can think there can be a part of ourselves to which God has no access, which we can keep 'unknown'.

But it is not just our actions that we think we can hide. We all have thoughts and imaginations we would never dream of sharing with anyone – our shadow side as it is often called. What goes on there we often cannot even express in prayer because we are ashamed and even scared of its power. We have this irrational idea that God knows nothing about it. But if God is, as we believe, the source of all things, it is quite illogical to think that there can be anything unknown. Indeed, Sunday by Sunday we say as much; *'Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open all desires known, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy spirit.....'*

Nonetheless, we can find this idea very hard to shift. When in trouble we pray for help instinctively knowing that God knows all about it and then continue to imagine we can maintain an inner life that is private.

It does not work of course, because our inner life finds its way out in our attitudes and actions, for there is nothing hidden that will not eventually come into the light. Or as Jesus put it, *"Whatsoever a man thinketh in his heart, so he is"*. God's knowledge of us is absolute.

The collect speaks of the frailty of our nature. I am sure this is not just about our physical bodies or our moral weakness but also the effect and consequence of living in a world of 'not-rightness' where daily we are buffeted by the sorrows of others and the grieving for God's creation. Might we understand our lives as set within a world that admits that there is something about human life that does not know its place in the world, does not recognise God's love and call to Christlikeness?

Such a theology would regard 'fallenness' as an intrinsic property of humans, not something transmitted from an original pair of sinning humans. Thus, the incarnation of Jesus is the culmination of God's long-suffering engagement with creation which groans awaiting its final redemption in God's purposes.

Is it unsurprising that we find it *'hard to stand upright'* for we are a part of this 'not-rightness' this 'groaning of creation'. The *'many and great dangers'* of which the collect speaks may not be as obvious as for many in this world, but such things take many forms. The very affluence we enjoy brings with it temptations and dangers which can destroy us. They do not necessarily have to be physical; we can be harmed emotionally and psychologically or by our greed, we play our part in endangering the creation which sustains us.

And note that the collect does not ask for us to be spared dangers and temptations but that we will know that God will carry and support us through them.

Knowing that we are known by God should bring us comfort. We struggle with it sometimes because we know ourselves – a bit – and feel uncomfortable for many reasons.

But this knowing that God has for our lives is a liberating thing that let us live our lives ‘out in the open’ as it were. It brings a freedom from pretence and greater authenticity in our words and actions. God knows us – our lives from beginning to end - and loves us. And if you find that hard, consider that your life is a miracle in the truest sense. That you have life at all, it’s a gift. God chose for you to have existence and has never stopped being involved!

His knowledge of us is to be welcomed as a knowing of love, not judgement, but of mercy and grace that seeks only our good. There is nothing to fear from being known in this way. In fact, if nothing else, it should encourage and enable us in the quiet of our hearts, to open the door, as it were, and let God inside – he is there anyway - which is why confession is so healing. Hidden away our thoughts have power – dragged, stuttering into the light robs them of that power. Giving words to our darkness is a stepping stone to then being able to turn it into prayer.

If it reveals our frailty and need, then that becomes our greatest asset for it drives us deeper in our faith and gives us a greater longing to know God and be known.

The Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

Intercessions

Let us pray to the Father through Christ our light and life.

Father, your Christ is acclaimed as the glory of Israel:
look in mercy on your Church, sharing his light ...

Your Christ in the Temple brings judgement on the world:
look in mercy on the nations who long for his justice ...
Your Christ, who was rich, for our sake became poor:
look in mercy on all who are in need
and those who suffer with him ...

Your Christ is the one in whom faithful servants find their peace:
look in mercy on the whole Church,
which glories in your salvation ...

Your Christ is the one destined for rejection:
look in mercy on us as we turn towards his passion.
Lord, have mercy.

Almighty Father,
you kept faith with Simeon and Anna,
and showed them the infant King.
Give us grace to trust your promises,
and patience to wait for their fulfilment.
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever.
Amen.

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.

And the blessing of God almighty, +
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen

HYMN

Firmly I believe and truly
God is Three, and God is One;
and I next acknowledge duly
manhood taken by the Son.

And I trust and hope most fully
in that Manhood crucified;
and each thought and deed unruly
do to death, as he has died.

Simply to his grace and wholly
light and life and strength belong,
and I love supremely, solely,
him the holy, him the strong.

Adoration aye be given,
with and through the angelic host,
to the God of earth and heaven,
Father, Son and Holy Ghost.