

## Candlemas 2006

Forty days ago I carried a baby up and down the aisle and I talked to you about God coming to us in the form of a baby "A silly tender babe" as a poet once put it. Our baby was very good indeed and enjoyed all the attention I think. Well today we see Jesus at six weeks old carried up the aisle of the Jerusalem Temple in much the same way. He was the centre of attention then as Mary and Joseph brought him to the Temple to offer him back to God; the law said that all first born children should be returned to God in this way and the parents usually offered a small sacrifice in order to buy him back. You may remember the story of Samuel, his mother Hannah didn't buy him back but left him with the old Priest Eli to grow into Israel's great prophet.

Mary and Joseph offered the sacrifice but that's not all that happened is it? Two older people saw in the baby a sign of the coming of God's kingdom. Simeon described him as the light and judgment and spoke of the pain that Mary his mother would be granted for God. Anna spoke of him as a sign of God's redemption. It's because of Simeon's words about light that we commemorate this event with candles and call this day 'Candlemas'.

Here's a candle that has a particular significance for us today.

As you'll know some of us have during this past week been away at the Diocesan conference and we bring this candle back as a sign of all that took place there; all that we learnt; all that we heard; all that we decided. At the closing Eucharist on Thursday a representative of each Parish in the Diocese took a candle and lit it and brought it home as a sign of all that we shall do to try to bring what happened at the centre out to the Parishes of the Diocese. Quite a lot of what I shall say in

the next few minutes will draw from things we heard over the past few days.

Now I should say straight away that when you haven't experienced an event like this conference it's very difficult to get enthusiastic when those who have come back and want to tell you all about it. It's very hard indeed to try to cascade things downwards so that everyone takes them on board. However we shall try; after all you paid for us to go so at the very least we must make sure we report back to you about what we gained from it. To that end I'd like to ask you to make a special effort to come to Evensong this evening. Those of us who went; that's Alison and myself along with Jenny Lewis, Gillian Million, Alan Hughes and Andrew Maclean, are going to tell you a bit about what we did and about the things we heard and saw which were both deeply challenging and greatly encouraging. Some of it must inform the way we go forward from here as a Parish so please come and hear about it and we'll see if we can begin to make it all touch us all. Evensong this evening. Come and hear how we spent your money, and let's start to think about what it might do for our mission here.

That mission is to proclaim the word and work of God. It's on all our parish literature and it is the reason Bromley Parish Church is here. The conference was about proclaiming the faith afresh. As The Bishop of Chichester reminded us that doesn't mean proclaiming a fresh faith; it is the faith once delivered to the Apostles and handed down through the generations but we are called upon to present it in the language; the images and the approaches which will enable the people of today to hear it.

First of all then we need to know a bit about the people of today. Well, that shouldn't be difficult should it? After all, we are the people of today; so, let me try to