

CANDLEMAS Sunday Newsletter

4th – 10th February 2024

Greetings from Eileen

Friends,

We have said farewell to January and, as we celebrate the Feast of **Candlemas, the Presentation of Christ at the temple**, the season of Epiphany is brought to its end. The lights are switched off our Stars in Gainford and Winston, our cribs put away, and trees that have remained are taken down. Candlemas represents both mortality and God's promise of eternal life. Simeon and Anna are in their twilight years – 2 godly people whose faith is firm in God are rewarded by the very presence of the Saviour, who is the Messiah and Christ the Lord. In their ending is a new beginning. Here is a



poem, where the poet offers insightful understanding of God's particular promise to Simeon. The status quo for Simeon would have been immortality – he would not die until he has seen the Messiah. And his absolute preference is realised when Jesus is presented by Mary and Joseph in the temple, and Simeon takes the Messiah into his very arms. Simeon's rejoicing is not a morbid release but faith-filled confidence in the eternal place of heaven's glory. Here is a photograph of an endearing public figure, Vanessa Redgrave, who I imagine the widow Anna, daughter of Phanuel and Saint of Candlemas to be rather like her.

In **February's issue of Parish News** (*electronic copies can be emailed to you every month on request from editors@parishnews.org.uk*), my piece is entitled: **Raising the Dragons**. In a week's time, we enter into a new Lunar Year and celebrate the Chinese New Year. Gainford St Mary's socials team invites everyone to join in the Chinese New Year party on Saturday 17th February 7pm in Gainford Village Hall. Donation of Raffle prizes would be most appreciated. For information, see the poster on the next page. There is a Chinese feature in our Diocesan News of me at the 80th Anniversary Service of the first woman priest in the Anglican Communion, Florence Li Tim-Oi, who was priested in Free China on 25th January 1944. Here's the link: <https://durhadiocese.org/celebrating-the-80th-anniversary-of-the-first-anglican-woman-priest.php>



Brian and I were delighted that almost 60 parishioners came along to **Drinks and Nibbles at the Vicarage last Sunday**. Occasional congregants, dear friends from Bishop Auckland David and Charlie Scott-King, prepared the delectable spread.

We have a **bonus of sermons** with this week's newsletter from Tom Deakin, Winston St Andrew's PCC officer, and GATHER and Pilgrimage Lead; and from Sarah Fells, Staindrop St Mary's Chair, PCC, and Children, Youth, Families and Schools Missioner. Training for Authorised and Licensed Lay Ministry, they favoured us with interesting sermons preached last Sunday at our 4 churches.

Services this Sunday, CANDLEMAS, 4th February 2024

9.15am	Holy Communion	Staindrop St Mary	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop with Claire Mead
9.30am	Holy Communion	Winston St Andrew	Rev'd Susanne Jukes
10.45am	Holy Communion	Gainford St Mary	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop with Claire Mead

May God who has set his seal upon us and as a pledge of what is to come, dwell in our hearts. Alleluia.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

The Temptation of Simeon Theodochos

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Luke 2.26

If you won't see Death before
you see the Messiah

Keep Your Eyes Shut.

Don't enter the temple to God's call,
you've gained immortality after all —

why listen to the songs they're singing?
Why hasten towards your ending?

Don't hold death in your arms
and proclaim it

Life.

But you're stood in the temple already,
praising this child you've seen.

Oh Simeon — God-receiver — enraptured in an
instant, answer this one question, please:

What does it mean to hold God in your arms
and know that you're dying?

*My friend, you misunderstand —
as I held The Christ to my chest
I saw Death*

fleeing away.

By Jay Hulme
From 'The Vanishing Song'

NOTICES

GATHER our roaming church meets on **Monday 5th February 7pm** in **Ingleton Village Hall**.

Would you pray for courage to invite someone you know who God may be prompting to come? Or perhaps you aren't able to extend an invitation without your own experience of **GATHER**; then you're most welcome also!

For children 7 to 12 years

Come and join us!

YOUTH SAINTS

Thursday 8th of February

From 6.30 to 8pm

Food

Crafts

Fun

Games

**In St Mary's Church
Gainford**

For more info contact Children's Missioner Sarah Fells
Email StMarys@gainfordwinston.church

**Our TODDLER
GROUP in
STAINDROP at St
Mary's Church
continues EVERY
THURSDAY from
9am in term time.**

Get in touch with Kath
kath.thacker@hotmail.co.uk or Sarah
stmarys@gainfordwinston.church for
more information.



FREE EVENT



We return to Ingleton for our
February **GATHERING**
Join us for casual conversation whilst we share food together
Before we enjoy live music and Bible discussion
All welcome

Worship - Prayer - Food & drink - Fellowship

MONDAY 5TH FEBRUARY, 7:00PM
INGLETON VILLAGE HALL

For more information about our future events:
info@gatherchurchteesdale.com
facebook.com/GatherChurchTeesdale

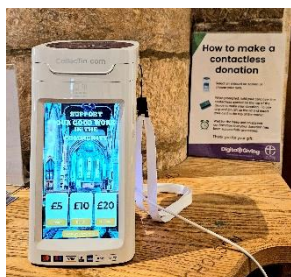


Warm and Welcome continues every **Friday 10am to 12noon** in **Gainford Village Hall**, with hot drinks, cake or other comfort food! A warm space to enjoy company, share or listen, and enjoy new activity proposed by regulars who have enjoyed this weekly time together.

Bereavement

We bade farewell to John Hodgson on Friday 2nd February 2024 at Wear Valley Crematorium and at Gainford St Mary's Church. John and his wife Kitty were active members of Winston St Andrew's Church and of the PCC for many years before moving to Gainford when John retired.

Joyce Bainbridge passed away on Wednesday 24th January 2024. Her **funeral service will take place at 12 noon Monday 19th February in St Mary's, Gainford** and thereafter a private Committal Service at Darlington Crematorium, with Refreshments afterwards at Headlam Hall.

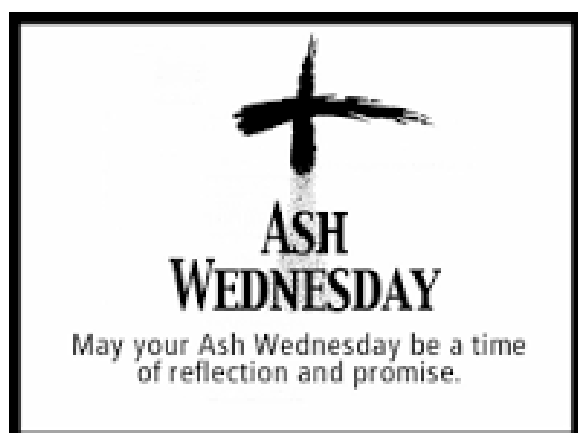


Digital Giving (Contactless) Devices are now available at our churches.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of contactless devices for credit card transactions have become widely used even in open markets. We now have devices located principally in Staindrop St Mary, who will share it with Ingleton St John for special events and services; and in Gainford St Mary, whose device is shared with GATHER and with Winston St Andrew for their special events and services. They help to enable donations even when people have no cash with them and are very easy to use. Although portable, they are secure, as donations made through them cannot be taken from them.

Tickets are available now from Geoff and Sue:
01325 730379 or after the 10.45am service in
Gainford, St Mary.

Expect a special evening with quizzes, dragon displays, live music from the Orient – fusion style with St Mary's handbell ringers and St Mary's Band, calligraphy – have your name in a Chinese character specially calligraphed, and be delighted by a Chinese New Year Birthday Cake! Of course there's the raffle with unique prizes to be won, and a bar to enjoy your favourite tipples. Then, dance the night away.



**CELEBRATE
CHINESE NEW YEAR**

**THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON
A BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR EVERYONE
GAINFORD VILLAGE HALL
SATURDAY 17TH OF FEBRUARY
AT 7PM**

**FOOD, BAR, MUSIC, DANCING AND RAFFLE
TICKETS £10.00 including Hot Supper
Ring 730379
Or email geoffandsue379@gmail.com
Proceeds for St. Mary's Church**

Lent begins with ASH WEDNESDAY 14th February with a Service of Communion and Ashing 9.30am at Winston St Andrew's Church. This is a joint service for all 4 parishes.

St Andrew's Church, Winston will open for an hour 6.30-7.30pm on Monday evenings throughout Lent for quiet reflection and prayer, culminating in a Guided Reflection on the Monday of Holy Week 25th February led by our Ordinand in Training Claire Mead.

Guided Reflections will also be held at Ingleton on Tuesday 26th March (time to be announced) led by Rev'd Moji Jaiyesimi in Ingleton Village Hall, and at Staindrop St Mary's Church on Wednesday 27th March (time to be announced) led by Licensed Lay Minister in Training Sarah Fells.

St Andrew's, Winston's LENT LUNCH will take place on Saturday 9th March in Winston Village Hall, and donations go to the local Food Bank.

Churches Together in Gainford's LENT LUNCHES take place on Tuesday 27th February in St Osmund's Centre, and on Wednesday 13th March in St Mary's, Gainford.

COLLECT for CANDLEMAS

Almighty and ever-living God,
clothed in majesty,
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the
Temple,
in substance of our flesh:
grant that we may be presented to you
with pure and clean hearts,
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and
Anna,
who lived to welcome the Messiah:
may we, who have received these gifts beyond
words,
prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes
to bring us to eternal life;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.
Amen

Readings for Candlemas

Hebrews 2:14-18

¹⁴ Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Luke 2:22-40

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 turtle-doves 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 for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped 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.

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.

Sermon: Sarah Fells Sunday 28th January 2024 (Mark 1: 21-28) at Staindrop and Ingleton

Jesus is no longer a baby! It's important to realise that before I go any further. In the Christian calendar we must commemorate the whole of Jesus thirty-three years within one year so although it is still January, we leap ahead a few years. Mark's gospel which was the first to have been written doesn't waste time telling of Jesus birth but almost immediately jumps straight into the beginning of his ministry. Jesus is still living in Nazareth, still with his family and still 'standing out'. Although now he is an adult about 30 years old.

Just before the passage we read today, we hear of three events.

Jesus' cousin John has been baptising and proclaiming that 'the one who is more powerful than I, is coming after me', and Jesus travels south from Nazareth to the river Jordan near Jerusalem and is baptised by his cousin John, **'and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from Heaven, 'You are my son the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.'**

Mark then tells of the immediate temptation of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness for forty days. **'and he was with the wild beasts and the angels waited on him.'** (Mark 1:13).

Lastly, we hear of the arrest of his cousin John.

The time has come. God's call must be answered. Jesus steps into the limelight. This is the beginning of Jesus' Ministry on earth.

Nazareth is a small town, a little larger than Ingleton, and everyone knows him in the synagogue as young Jesus, Joseph and Mary's eldest, who vexed his parents once when he stayed behind in the temple at Passover. He must move away if he is to be acknowledged as a man in his own right. He heads about forty miles northeast to Capernaum and makes his home there. Now Capernaum is a little larger than Staindrop but is a bustling port on the north end of Lake Galilee, or the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum means 'village of comfort'. It is a garrison town and is on the main trade route. Jesus will spend much of his ministry here.

Now we are up to speed with the background.

It's the Sabbath, the Jewish holy day. Everyone is at the synagogue. Anyone can be invited to preach, and Jesus is welcomed by the rabbi. The people listen to him eagerly and are **'astounded at his teaching for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'**

Scribes wrote out passages and copied the law for teaching. They interpreted difficult passages. In Jesus's time they were influential, powerful men who enjoyed debating and often their 'sermons' were just repeating what they had read in books. Jesus was different. He knew what he was talking about. Think

back to Jesus the boy, in the temple, that Passover. When his anxious parents finally found him, He declared, **‘Did you not know that I must be in my father’s house?’** (Luke 2:49).

I am a member of a drama group and have performed in many Shakespeare plays. When we have our first read through of a four-hundred-year-old Shakespeare script, the parts are shared out and we take turns reading – how many of you are squirming now remembering English classes at school? No one really knows the text and we muddle along mis-pronouncing words and not really understanding what we have just said. It can be quite painful! One year a new member arrived and when they read the lines, the words were brought to life, and we immediately understood what was being said. The text was made relevant. You cannot do that unless you have spent time studying – or were there when the words were written. With line learning and rehearsals together, by the opening night we were all up there too, ready to step into the limelight and make the story and characters relevant to the audience of the day but still using the ancient words.

Jesus used the same words the scribes were using - the ancient Jewish text - and brought it to life, made it relevant to the people of the day. No wonder the people were astounded by his teaching.

This isn’t all they are astounded at though. Someone in the synagogue recognises Jesus for who he really is. Not just young Jesus who stayed behind in the temple once at Passover, but **the Holy One of God**. While the others in the synagogue feel there is something about Jesus that makes their hearts stir, this voice can name him.

In Jesus’ time, Jews believed that mental illness was caused by unclean spirits or demons. This man who is suffering calls out loudly that he knows Jesus has the power to destroy the evil inside him. Over two thousand years later there is still so much to learn about mental health compared with physical health and so many stigmas attached to mental illness. For all Mark’s gospel is succinct, he is particularly interested in telling us how Jesus casts out evil spirits. It was believed that if you knew someone’s real name and called it out you somehow had power over them. When Jesus answers with **‘Be silent, and come out of him!’** He isn’t telling the suffering man not to say these words but the unclean spirit. He heals the man and counters the spirit with the power of God. The man suffering finds relief from pain.

The people in the synagogue are quite rightly amazed by his actions. Sometimes we hear the phrase ‘actions speak louder than words.’ Jesus is making it quite clear that he is an authority on both and often uses both to get his point across.

‘What’s this? A new teaching- with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.’

Jesus studied God’s word and was able to speak with authority. In his day it was the Jewish Torah. We have the Old Testament and been blessed with the Gospels which were written at the earliest by people who were there and can tell us of the man. What he said and what he did.

Jesus was a man of action, a man of deeds, to demonstrate how we should live our lives. We are called to act, but sometimes fall short of the task. Even Jesus had fears he would fall short in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, **‘My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.’** (Matthew 26).

Jesus answered God’s call. It’s a call we have all had or we wouldn’t be here today! God has called us by our name and has power over us in the best possible way. If you have never heard Bernadette Farrell’s song *‘You have called us by our name’* based on Isaiah 43, I would urge you to listen. *‘You have chosen us to be members of your family, in your love you have created us to live in unity.’* God continues to call us. Sometimes a gentle nudge, sometimes jolting us quite harshly out of our comfort zone! God knows this and understands. That’s why he sent Jesus who died for us so we could live for him. By what we say and what we do. This is not as difficult as you might think. He is not asking us to **BE** Jesus but to **LIKE** him and make him relevant to our lives today. Sharing what we learn with others on the way. Bishop Paul mentioned serving God’s continuing call yesterday at his retirement service. He also reminded us that

God is faithful. The time has come. God's call must be answered. We can step into the limelight. This is the beginning of our Ministry on earth. Amen.

Sermon: Tom Deakin on Sunday 28th January 2024 (Mark 1: 21-28) at Winston and Gainford

This morning's reading from the Gospel according to Mark, is certainly one which addresses a topic many Christians may feel is perhaps less useful for our modern times. Yet in truth what we do not have a modern perspective on, is perhaps a blind spot which we cannot truly yet see occurring in our modern daily lives.

The section in the Gospel of Mark discusses Jesus's early ministry in Capernaum. Simon and Andrew who joined Jesus and cast away their nets in the verses prior to our reading today – were both based at Capernaum. This village had around a population of 1,500 and was primarily focused on the fishing trade, being as it was established on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. In these verses today, we get the beginnings of a snapshot from St Mark of the activities in this village during a 24-hour period – perhaps to show us, as readers what Jesus was up to on a typical day! However, the day turned out to be anything but typical. Our reading begins with the start of this day, the sabbath service in the Synagogue. Eventually developing into Jesus setting off for more widespread mission, likely because it was acutely needed. Capernaum was an area which was – in terms of religion - known as a bit of a backwater!

Of course, Jesus knew exactly where to go to be most effective and was there for a reason. All good Jews attended the Synagogue on the sabbath, with teachers usually drawn from the local area rather than brought in from elsewhere. To be asked to teach was a privilege, and it would seem Jesus was developing a *reputation* at this time for being a gifted, enigmatic speaker.

An interesting aspect of the Synagogues at the time was that it was mandated that where you had a group of ten Jewish homes you must have a synagogue built. This led to it being the centre of faith life for those who followed the *Torah* – the law with families studying and praying together. Attending was quite different to visiting a temple, and no singing or worship would occur. The main focus was on learning the laws, and prayerful contemplation of them.

To understand how Jesus's teaching was so remarkable, it isn't that he was just a fantastic, charismatic speaker, but it was his style which was entirely novel to those listening at the time. Back then, typically the scribes were the group able to preach in synagogues, and their style was entirely devoid of personal interpretation of what they were teaching. Jesus threw that style out of the window and turned it upside down. One of many norms he was able to change during his life of ministry.

For context, to Jews, the most Sacred thing in the world was *The Torah* – the book they called the law, similar to our Old Testament – and the scribes were not allowed to deviate from what was established and agreed teaching – instead they would spend their time *interpreting* the law into rules and regulations and they would teach through these.

Therefore, when Mark states that Jesus's teaching caused *astonishment*, we must not underestimate this word. It is stated in the reading today that Jesus taught with *his personal authority*. In the New Living Translation version of the Bible we heard this morning, it is termed *real authority*. Scribes, by contrast, would quote a precedent, and then would state the authorities – the backing citations – for such a precedent – a lot like our legal process today. It certainly doesn't sound very accessible – to me! As we have learned - Jesus spoke with what we understand to be *real authority*, which can be understood to be speaking with God's

Grace. Jesus is different: bold, dynamic, demanding and most of all exciting to listen to! Mark unfortunately neglects to tell us the contents of this sermon, but we are reliably informed - it was a belter!

We have established the early ministry of Jesus was focused on teaching rather than miracles, and that he quickly developed a reputation for being a gifted speaker – yet if Jesus’s words had left people inspired, then his deeds were about to leave them absolutely *amazed*.

In the Synagogue, using his same words *of authority*, Jesus also spoke words of healing. Sometimes, like in our reading, people have had a life which had become a waking nightmare for them – personalities taken over with doubt and pain – and one so afflicted person challenged Jesus on that sabbath, during his teaching. In what would be the first victory over the powers of evil, Jesus demonstrated that *his authority* was in *deed* - as well as word.

The unclean spirit revealed in verse 23 immediately recognised Jesus as someone special, calling him out by name, using the title “The Holy One of God”, and was promptly cast out rapidly by Jesus and made unable to speak – using the Hebrew word for silence – *damamah* - to ensure Jesus’s special nature would remain undiscovered until it was the right time to do so.

This was to be the first miracle according to the Gospel according to Mark, and led to his unwelcome fame beginning to spread, starting the journey of what would become his rising profile and eventual conflict with the authorities as he was making his remarkable ministry known.

This exorcism presents us a difficult topic when looked through with our modern lens. How many of us have seen one, or heard of one? Yet at the time, in Galilee these were certainly something those living there would have been familiar with - perhaps not commonplace - but certainly: exorcism was known, and understood. Reading with today’s parlance, however, we can see how this could be speaking to remember to emphasise and understand Jesus’s power of redemption and healing. That there is no sphere of life which falls outside his remarkable authority. Or no predicament which people can fall to, even when they are with unclean spirit, which he cannot rescue them from.

Discussing unclean spirits may challenge us as Western Christians. It may seem that in many contexts, vigilance against the reality of spiritual evil is sometimes considered *passé* – something which has had its day – yet it should not be ignored. Jesus in Matthew 19 states that everything is possible with faith in God; and with that in mind as we then become conduits of his grace we are then capable of healing and supporting others. Therefore *vigilance* in the things that can distract us from this further, fruitful, embedded relationship as we remain faithful with God must be kept.

As churches, as Christians, we must remember to hold our faith close as we speak and act with that same authority demonstrated by Jesus. The grace of God working through us: in our beautiful area, within our families, at our workplaces, and in our homes - letting us find the saving power of God unleashed. This indwelling of grace through faith is the key to being emissaries of God’s love into the world, even despite frequent panic or despair when we consider the ways of the world, we should remember this world has been claimed by the loving authority of Jesus.

Amen