

Mike's message

From the Manger to the Cross

As I write this there's still a week to go to Christmas and it seems strange to be turning our attention to Lent!

Easter is fairly early this year, write it in your diary for 1st April if you haven't already, and Ash Wednesday falls on 14th February. Valentine's Day and April Fools Day!

Make of that what you will. Just before Lent starts we have the Feast of Candlemass. It's 2nd February, a Friday this year, and it's also often the theme of the closest Sunday. It's when the Christmas and Epiphany season ends and we hear the last of the readings from the Gospel accounts of the first Christmas. It's also called The Presentation of Christ in the Temple and we'll hear of the infant Jesus being taken to the Jerusalem Temple by Mary and Joseph in thanksgiving for his birth. (Luke 2 .22 - 38). The reading contains the chilling prophecy of an old Holy Man, Simeon, who tells Mary:

"This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce you own soul too"

(Luke 2 .34,35)

That passage reminds us that we can't stay by the manger with all the cosy memories of Christmas, but that we need to turn our thoughts towards the starkness of the Cross and Jesus' death and resurrection.

In his hauntingly beautiful carol "Born in the Night" Methodist minister Geoffrey Ainger helps us to make this shift in focus. It's a carol I like to use at Candlemass as we turn our focus from Christmas towards Lent:

*Truth of our life,
Mary's child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true,
Mary's child,
go to your cross of wood.*

(Born in the Night, verse 3)

What does Jesus mean to you? Is he the fragile infant in the manger or the broken and executed man on the Cross? The Word that existed before time began, or the Risen and glorified Lord? Or one of the many other ways of understanding who Jesus is. For most of us I suppose he's all of these, and more. AS this month we link the Manger and the Cross we embrace the life of Jesus; who was born among us, lived as one of us, died for us and rose again.

