

Mike's message

Lent: Pantomime and Passion

No sooner are the Christmas decorations returned to the loft than we start to focus on Lent!

In reality our observance of the Christmas and Epiphany season comes to an end with the great feast of Candlemas (2nd February). We'll be celebrating that in the closest Sunday, which is 1st February this year. Candlemas, or The Presentation of Christ in the Temple, is when we think about

Mary and Joseph taking the infant Jesus to the Temple to give thanks for his birth. It's recounted in Luke's Gospel (2 .22 - 40). After that account, apart from an intriguing reference to Jesus on a trip to Jerusalem at the age of about ten (Luke 2 .41-52), we hear nothing else about him in the Gospels for around thirty years of his life!

It's at the Presentation of Christ in the Temple that we remember the words of the elderly holy man Simeon, working in the Temple, who warns Mary that Jesus' life will be the means of the falling and rising of many in Israel, and that a sword will pierce her own heart too. The latter is seen as a reference to the sorrow and anguish Mary will encounter when Jesus is tried, convicted and crucified.

Candlemas is very much a time of turning from the Cradle to the Cross, from Christ's Birth to his Passion and death. Lent is always shortly after Candlemas, and this year there's barely two weeks before we enter Lent on Ash Wednesday (18th February).

Ash Wednesday will be marked at St Andrew's in two ways. Firstly we'll be holding a Fun Day for our young people, and any friends they want to bring. Details are available in church or from Margaret Morgan (and elsewhere in this magazine). It's a way of focussing on the season and it's meaning. Then, in the evening at 7.30pm, there'll be the Ash Wednesday Service with Imposition of Ashes (marking a cross on the foreheads of the present) from which the day takes it's name. It's a reminder of our mortality and our need to keep Lent as a time of repentance.

I'm indebted to Revd Liz Brown who'll be standing in for me on Ash Wednesday. As many of you will know I've taken on a role in the Wesley Pantomime (16th - 21st February at 7.30pm nightly), so will be treading the boards. If you want to come details of how to get tickets are in the Circuit Bulletin part of this magazine.

The art of Pantomime has a long history but some of it's origins are in common with the medieval Mystery Plays. Like pantomime they are also sometimes bawdy and slapstick. While pantomimes are usually on the theme of folk tales or fairy stories, Mystery Plays focus on the Gospel accounts - albeit often very loosely. At the centre of them though is that great narrative of Christ's Passion, his death and resurrection.

We'll be focussing on the Passion of Christ in our Lent Course this year. We'll be looking at Chapters 26 and 27 of Matthew's Gospel - and using art and music to help us understand the message of those chapters, and of our faith in Christ crucified and Risen. Details of the Lent Course can be found elsewhere in this magazine.

Come and join us on our Lenten journey.

