

Candlemas



The 2nd of February sees the feast of Candlemas celebrated in the Christian Church. Traditionally, candles to be used in homes throughout the year would be brought to church to be blessed in honour of the occasion of Mary and Joseph bringing the child Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem.

It is difficult to imagine a more vulnerable figure than the young woman, Mary. If truth is told, in the ancient world of Palestine, Mary would have been little more than a young adolescent girl. Found to be with child outside of wedlock, in a patriarchal world in which women were viewed as little more than property - the shame of carrying a child, deemed illegitimate, would normally have meant that the life for such a young girl would have been over before it had started.

Mary's vulnerability connects for us in our own time and society, including within our own communities, with vulnerable women who live within unsafe marriages – physically and emotionally - and with young girls who feel unsafe, even in school from predatory boys – themselves young and immature. The issue of boys who have grown up not knowing what it is to have respect for the opposite sex; not knowing what it is to have wholesome and meaningful relationships with girls, has recently been highlighted. The latter exacerbated by easy access to pornography. Mary's vulnerability and the unsafe world in which she found herself is in many respects still very much with us in the C21st.

Mary's world is made safe by God himself. However we want to interpret the miraculous stories and the power of the Holy Spirit, the point is that Mary is not abandoned. The life that grows within her is honoured. Joseph steps in to hold tenderly, to walk alongside, and takes on the responsibilities of what it means to be a father - to provide and to help nurture. Most importantly, Mary's faith sustains her; the gift of God within her overcomes the innumerable obstacles that are thrown in her path – including being made homeless and the flight into Egypt as a refugee.

In our hearts, as we humbly venerate Mary's story in the unfolding of God's love for all of us – we hold too with sensitivity and empathy the place of vulnerable women and girls within our world and communities whose daily lives are marred by fear and anxiety. Our prayer is that our faith in God will encourage us all to be vigilant, and to work wherever and whenever we can to promote wholesome relationships in which all women, and all men, and all girls and all boys are enabled to flourish.

Happy Candlemas!

God Bless.

Revd Mark Bailey