

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Candlemas (with Baptism) – 30th January 2022

All Saints' Marseille

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Today is a day of joy and hope. The joy and hope that the revelation of the Christ Child in the Temple brings, even if the words 'joy' and 'hope' do not appear in Luke's account. For us at All Saints, this morning, the joy and hope that the baptism of a child brings to a family and to a community of faith.

Luke's account of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple focuses on the Child, but it also describes the responses of the adults around him.

Mary and Joseph must have been in a solemn mood on that day, as many parents are when they bring their child to be baptised. Jewish law taught that God was to be honoured in everyone's rising up and lying down, in going out and coming in, in daily life and in special events, through rituals that acknowledged that life is sacred and that the divine is present everywhere and at every time. Trusting in the promises of God, Mary and Joseph go to the Temple to carry out, faithfully, the practices of their faith. They bring their child to the place of God's dwelling, to present him to the Lord. He belongs to God - God claims him as his Son.

Simeon and Anna bring a new dimension of expectation and fervour to the story. They recognise in this child born in poverty the one who will embody the consolation and salvation of God. Through the presence of this child, God gives the world the Good News.

They cannot but respond to Christ's presence, which brings light, peace and boundless freedom.

This morning, we have gathered as a community to celebrate Miahya's baptism and to respond to it. Every baptism is meaningful not only for the candidate, their family and friends, but also for all of us. As a church family, we will be reminded of how God works in our lives through his grace, which we have received in our own baptism and which is an ever-present reality in our lives. We

have a chance this morning to reflect on the moment when we entered into the life of Christ and to ponder how to live up to the great gifts God has given us.

There is endless comfort in knowing that we have been presented and received by God. The world in which we adults live is not always friendly or generous, but we are assured that we belong to God. It is reported that Martin Luther used to say “I am baptised” when he was plagued with fear and anxiety, with doubt and discouragement. He didn’t fight his own demons saying “I believe” or “I have faith”, but “I am baptised”. I would think that by this he meant: “I belong to God – God claims me as his child.”

Baptism is indeed the ultimate expression of how we belong to God. There is no power that can separate us from God’s love. In baptism, God will say: “Miahy, you are my daughter, my beloved, in you I take great delight.”

Yet baptism is only the beginning of a journey. Newly baptised children will grow up, and they will be faced with the same decisions and choices we all face: to live for Christ or for the world? Did anyone say that the path we journey on as Christians is uncomplicated and smooth? Did Simeon say to Mary that her child will encounter no opposition or rejection? I don’t think so.

That is why we have a duty to surround Miahy and her family with love, prayers and support. I don’t know if it takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a family of faith to encourage and nurture her mysterious relationship with Christ that begins in her baptism.

Parents, grandparents and godparents, God has prepared a gift for you in Miahy’s baptism. Over the years, you will see the life of Christ unfolding in her and this will give you very great joy. Yet you also receive great responsibility today, for in this complex world of ours the life in Christ is fragile and needs to be protected.

You will always be the first role models for Miahy – from you she will learn how to persevere when she has setbacks, how to get up when she falls. She will learn to be patient and compassionate, caring and loving.

Protect Miahy’s faith with your own faith, strengthen it with your example, encourage and cherish it with your love. The words that you’ll be saying shortly during the baptism, in Miahy’s name – treasure them, and ponder them in your

hearts. For you are on one of the greatest adventures a family can know: watching Miah grow, become strong and filled with wisdom.

May the favour of God be always upon her.

Amen.