

Friends

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of February marks the celebration of Candlemas, the official end of the Christmas/Epiphany season. Last week, I was invited to St. George's with colleagues from other churches in Windsor, and we were shown around, had tea with the new Canon (Revd Dr. Nick Brown) and joined the congregation for evensong. I was struck by the fact that some Christmas decorations, including the nativity scene, were still up.

Having grown up in a tradition where Christmas decorations went up on Christmas Eve and came down on 12<sup>th</sup> Night, I was interested to discover that for many people, the correct day to take them down is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February. The feast of Candlemas marks the day when Mary returned to the temple for ritual purification, 40 days after the birth of her child, and Jesus was presented on that moving occasion when both Simeon and Anna finally met him.

Symbolising Jesus as the Light of the World, it is the day when many churches bless all candles that will be used for the coming year, lit candles are placed in windows and (particularly in France) pancakes are eaten. If you like pancakes, this is a good excuse to have them twice in February!

There is a folk tradition that bright weather on Candlemas signifies a longer winter, which is interesting when we consider that the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February in the USA marks Groundhog Day, when it is believed that groundhogs come out of their burrows at the end of hibernation and if they see their shadow (i.e. it is sunny) then they go back to sleep for another six weeks thus forecasting six more weeks of winter. Currently, the forecast for Monday is cloudy, so perhaps winter will end earlier this year.

Candlemas is one of those church days that I have only discovered through conversation with ecumenical partners. Still, it feels like an important day: the first story that we have of Jesus after the birth narrative, and one of very few mentions of Joseph. This year I plan to light a candle and place it in my window to remember all of those who have waited, like Simeon and Anna, for hope to come into their lives. Perhaps you might like to join me.

God bless, Vicci