



Season of Lay Ministries

Presentation of Christ (Candlemas)

28 January 2024

Presentation of Christ

Readings

Malachi 3:1-5
Ps 24: {1-6} 7-end
Hebrews 2:14-end
Luke 2:22-40

In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen!

As I walked along the hospital corridor-swaddling the new baby in my arms, as a midwife, I was aware the baby's family would be ecstatic with the message to be announced. The long-awaited news, everyone had been hoping, longing, and praying for. This hope, corresponding to Simeon's reflections of Jesus in today's gospel reading - the message of this family's new arrival- a new baby, a new beginning!

In my context, experiences such as this are now bygone days. Nonetheless, today's Old Testament reading may have a daily significance in all Christians lives. The scripture according to Malachi 3: verses 1-5 speaks of a different type of messenger; John the Baptizer. John the Baptist would foreshadow our Saviour Jesus Christ by being an inspiration, overzealous and affirming the 'King' yet to come. Jesus was not to be born in a private hospital, neither was it expected his birth would go viral-for now! or gain the VIP status now attributed to him.

- Very Important Person - YES!
- Victory In Providence - Absolutely!

Affirmed

In this season of Lay Ministries, God affirms us all through the birth of Jesus Christ, as an atonement, a victory from our sins. This is beautifully pointed out in today's reading from Hebrews stating, "He [Jesus] might make atonement for the sins of the people." When Jesus leads the way by gently affirming and encouraging us to follow him in all his practices,

this chapter closes proclaiming 'Jesus to be a high priest in service to God.' But what does it mean to be affirmed in our modern-day culture? To be affirmed is to be viewed in a positive light, to receive the respect of your peers, colleagues, and even strangers. Further, in offering an affirmation, you may respond positively, offering a 'yes' in response or reflecting theologically, offering a resounding AMEN.

Today, we are aware of the different modes of communication used to affirm. Landlines, albeit less used, mobiles (who recalls the brick shaped mobiles and the comical television parodies) or Facebook, Snapchat, Telegram, What's App, Instagram, X and Tik Tok. Now, if your video/podcast/film has 'gone viral,' then you are a sensation, an online celebrity, someone who is going places. Simply put, you have been affirmed! Yet these fleeting moments vary differently to how God sees and affirms us. The Psalmist speaks of turning away from trusting in idols in so doing 'will receive blessing from the Lord...of those who seek his face.' This recalls my recent licensing and commissioning in October 2023 alongside my fellow lay ministers, commencing a similar journey yet having a different calling to become affirmed. During our retreat weekend, the Readers, Lay Pioneers, Family and Children's workers, and Southwark Pastoral Auxiliaries reflected on our own individual journeys and in my context, becoming a Church Army Evangelist. Initiated by taking 'risks' notably at my initial interview, where I wore 1970's knee-high boots, a flying cape and a determination knowing nobounds. Now this is another sermon, but to God be all the glory!

Reaffirmed

Returning to today's Gospel reading, Simeon, a devout, righteous man was determined not to die until he had personally set eyes on the child the one to be king, the hope of all the nations and the Light of the world. For Simeon, this was a sign God was affirming his unfailing love, obedience and faith in him. With peace and piety, Simeon professed 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace'

according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' Considering this declamation brothers and sisters, let me propose a question - is it not the same God we all worship? Is he a changing God whose word will return void or renders false truths? On the contrary! He is the same faith filled loving Father who affirms all of us through his Son, Jesus Christ but seeks us to draw closer to him because 'we know in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.' Through Jesus's death and resurrection, we are affirmed.

However, God desires us to be fearless, embarking and walking upon roads, through lands and reaching nations neither seen nor heard of. Moreover, the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 explains that we are chosen 'in order that you may proclaim the marvellous acts of him ... who called you out of the darkness into his amazing light'. Importantly, God will use all your individual talents and giftings for the Kingdom. But be mindful of this, often our heavenly gifts are best employed within our local communities, towns and villages. These are the places we know, are familiar with and which get the juices flowing. Better still, we know what our local community's needs, seeks and should be asking for. And what would be better than standing with God's people as a Lay Minister and affirming your locality because you have been affirmed by God to do so.

Brothers and sisters, let us all be moved by the Holy Spirit, just as Simeon was, in this season of Lay Ministry. Jesus has already gone before us. Your brothers and sisters who were commissioned in October have gone before you. Will you be next to be selected, trained, and affirmed to minister for and in your local parish?

My 1970's boots await your call.... Amen.

Miranda Okon, Church Army Evangelist, St John, West Wickham

A prayer for the Season of Lay Ministries 2024

Written by Marie Williams, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary (SPA), Holy Saviour, Croydon

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' Isaiah 6:8 (NRSV)

Lord Jesus,
We give you thanks that
you consider us worthy to serve you
and have called us into ministries of many different kinds.

We pray for all those who are exploring what God's call means in their lives.

Help them to know God's peace and guiding as they listen for God's voice.

And we pray for those already in ministry that as they carry out your work you will help them to demonstrate your love,
your compassion and your truth
so that others may see your beauty and embrace you as Lord and Saviour

We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Suggested hymns

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire
Father of heaven, whose love profound
The spacious firmament on High
Hail to the Lord who comes
New light has dawned, the Son of God is here
Christ be our light
Faithful vigil ended
Lift up your heads
King of glory King of peace
Love divine all loves excelling
Name of all majesty fathomless mystery