



**Call to Worship** Peace and light to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

**Hymn 346** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs33JlcQljg>

Christ is the world's Light, he and no other;  
born in our darkness, he became our brother.  
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:  
glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Life, he and no other;  
sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother -  
he who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:  
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Peace, he and no other;  
no man can serve him and despise his brother  
who else unites us, one in God the Father?  
Glory to God on high.

Give God the glory, God and no other;  
give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;  
give God the glory, God in man my brother:  
glory to God on high.

*Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)*

### Prayer

Almighty and eternal God, we come before your presence singing. From all that we are, for all that you are, we offer our lives to you. You are our Maker and Minder: in you, darkness becomes light; chaos becomes order; and the desert bears fruit. You are our friend: reaching out a hand of forgiveness in the face of all our failings; embracing us with strength and courage. You are our Guide: breathing your Spirit in us, so that we can know your grace in our lives and show your grace in the world. Loving God, Maker and Minder, Friend and Guide, we come before You now in worship.

**Reading** Luke 2: 21 – 40

**Hymn 229** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0wSHa7QyQo>

Mary and Joseph  
came to the Temple,  
brought the boy Jesus,  
offered him there.  
People were waiting  
wanting to greet him,  
long had they sought him,  
solace for care.

Now she is praising,  
filled with elation;  
here is God's promise,  
Christ is her light.

Anna had prayed there,  
widowed, long waiting;  
worshipping God by  
day and by night.

Simeon sings now  
God offers blessing,  
brilliantly gilding  
dawn of his day;  
light in the darkness,  
never extinguished,  
light of all nations,  
light up our way. *Andrew Pratt (b. 1948)*

## Sermon

The 2nd February is marked in many traditions as “Candlemas”; It was a service when people brought candles to be blessed. People took these hallowed candles home to be lit during a thunderstorm, or when someone was ill, and a Candlemas candle was often placed in the hands of the dying with the words, “Lord, let your servant depart in peace according to your word.”

It was a service about light in the darkness. It also had its roots in pagan culture falling ½ way point between shortest day and the day in spring when daytime and night time are the same length – so it stands looking back to the depth of darkness and forward to the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Spring.

How appropriate then are our texts for this festival.

The scene is set as the family come to the Temple, the seat of tradition. It’s a scene of great piety, and the HS is at work here. It is no accident that Simeon, Anna and the holy family meet. This is the moment that these Holy people having been praying and waiting all these years for. It is out of this deep rootedness in God’s covenant people that the message of Jesus comes.

It moves Anna to praise and to tell others what is happening. She knows that the new thing God is doing is not really new but is God keeping an old promise. The new old promise is expressed by Simeon. “salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

It’s a beautiful story but it contains a dire warning: this light comes for "the rise and fall of many in Israel," - echoes of Mary’s Magnificat.

The Light is a troublemaker. Anyone who turns on a light creates shadows. The work of the psychiatrists Freud and Jung talk of a shadow side in all of us... that bit that we’ve pushed into a dark cupboard and tried to forget about.

The bits we don’t want to share with others. “the inner Thoughts of many a heart, “as Simeon puts it.”

And what is true for individuals is true for society as a whole too. Shady dealings in the corridors of power that are considered the norm. Atrocities that remain in the dark because we as a human race turn a blind eye. The light to the gentiles, the light of the world, reminds us of the shadows.

One of the most poignant lines in this story comes as Simeon, having offered his public prayer, turns to Mary and quietly warns her that she herself will be hurt, “pierced by the two-edged sword of God’s Word.” After all this young girl’s been through, and bravely agreed to be God’s humble servant the whole enterprise will pierce her very being.

The thing is that there is no light without darkness and we are reminded here that even in god’s story of salvation there is a dark thread woven through it at both a personal and world-wide level.

The very act of trying to expel the darkness is itself going to bring pain. Think of the those who have suffered as they tried to shine the light of Christ in the world, from the famous like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela to those who are nameless and have just disappeared from their communities for speaking truth unto power.

But it’s not just the great and the good -In fact it is expected of us all.

Remember those verses from the sermon on the mount? They always bring back the words of a song from Godspell which goes “*You are the light of the world /But if that light is under a bushel/It’s lost something kinda crucial/ You gotta be bright to be the light of the world.*” And while some find themselves in the most awful of circumstances as they try to shine the Christ light this was the chorus of the song; “*So let your light so shine before men/Let your light so shine/So that they might know some kindness again/We all need help to feel fine*”

In a world that feels so angry at the moment, spreading kindness is a necessary nightlight - and you are not alone. The light you shine is not of your striking but from Jesus. John 8 tells us : Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Though it might sometimes feel hopeless let us remember that Anna and Simeon waited lifetimes and when the Spirit showed them the hope for the world they looked back into history and forward into the future. This festival looks back to the dark days and forward to spring.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1)

**Prayer of intercession** (you may like to light a candle as you pray this prayer including situations which are close to your heart)

Heavenly Father, we are not altogether convinced that darkness is a thing of the past. Many people in this world of ours feel their world is one of darkness and gloom. Pressures crowd in upon us and get us down.

The causes are varied: bereavement, illness, money, worries about family, trouble at work or not having work, drugs, drink, boredom, doubt, weariness, futility.

Then there are the world issues: war, poverty, climate change, disease, unfair trade and so on.

It does not help when we feel that as Christians we should be doing so much better than we are.

Gracious and loving God, we rejoice that you are with us in our troubles, you know us and you love us – always.

Hear us as in a moment of silence we pray for those in darkness (of whatever kind) – let us pray that they may see and know the light of Christ:

*Silence*

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Hear our prayers, Lord, spoken and unspoken and answer them for Jesus' sake. **Amen**

**Hymn 706** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-3nV5vNxJk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-3nV5vNxJk)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

light for the world to see.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Christ be our light...

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed.

Christ be our light! ...

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone.

Christ be our light! ,,,

Many the gifts, many the people,

many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another, making your kingdom come.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

*Bernadette Farrell*

Rest now in peace, for your eyes have seen the salvation which God has prepared for all people.

Grow in strength and wisdom and bring forth a harvest of righteousness and praise.

And may God smile upon you and make you strong and wise;

May Christ Jesus share his inheritance with you freely;

And may the Holy Spirit open your eyes to the presence of God's Messiah. **Amen.**