



Presentation of Christ in the Temple – (Candlemas)

Luke 2:22-38 (King James Version)

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.



The Presentation of the Lord

Stained glass, 1930, Mayer of Munich

St Monica's, Palmers Green

<https://loandbeholdbible.com/2018/03/12/the-presentation-at-the-temple-luke-222-38/>



And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,
Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.
And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.
And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;
And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.
And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is celebrated by the Church on 2 February, forty days after Christmas. It was previously known as Candlemas, since on that day candles were blessed to mark the arrival of Christ, the light of the world. The story is also included in the devotion of the Rosary, as the Fourth Joyful Mystery. As such, it has long been a popular subject in Church art.

This colourful stained glass window picturing the Presentation at the Temple dates to 1930 and is by Mayer of Munich. Reflecting that studio's ornate style, it focuses on Simeon's praise of God, with the baby Jesus in his arms. To the left, St Joseph is carrying the pigeons required for the offering, while the Virgin is 'treasuring' the event in her heart (cf. Luke 2:51). The elderly Anna – and several priests – show their own interest in the child on the right.

Read more - <https://loandbeholdbible.com/2018/03/12/the-presentation-at-the-temple-luke-222-38/>

Lent

Lent is a season for reflection – to step back from the immediate pressures of the world to take stock and to seek God's help in meeting the deeper challenges of life. This can be uncomfortable, as it forces us to face the truth about ourselves, but it is also necessary if we are to seek and receive God's forgiveness as fully as that forgiveness is offered. The forgiveness of sin is one of the key purposes for Jesus, and the cost and achievement of his death and resurrection is a core part of our Easter celebration. True forgiveness is freeing – freeing from the toxic trauma of guilty feelings: not that our responsibility for the consequences of our actions is diminished, but the power of the shame – what is sometimes the compulsion to hide the truth because we don't dare face it – is taken away. In words that I remember from my youth "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will free us from our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness". This was one of the "comfortable words" which was part of the Book of Common Prayer and also a regular part of the confession in the services of my youth. The words are, in fact from the Bible: 1 John 1:8-9.

These thoughts came to mind partly because in January I take time out to talk to some ordination candidates about money and parish finances – relating practical matters also to spiritual and ethical concerns. I usually reference a book from my youth by Richard Foster: *Money, Sex and Power* – a reflection on the wisdom of the ancient monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience: vows which address key human drivers of sin and seek to face them head on. Foster’s book “*Celebration of Discipline*” is perhaps better known, certainly to Christians of my generation – his reflections as an American evangelical quaker on the commitments of the human life and the challenges and joys of discipleship contain wisdom which needs to be rediscovered in every generation. Either book would be a good one to read during Lent. But I want to reflect briefly on the themes of Money, Sex and Power.

Money

Money was not invented by God – it is a convenience that human beings have brought to economic affairs. There is no suggestion that Adam and Eve had money in the Garden of Eden. But we are reminded in the Bible that the love of money is at the root of every kind of evil and that we cannot serve both God and mammon. If you read the Gospels with money as your lens you will find that it is one of the most frequent topics addressed – should you pay your taxes? Who gave the most at the temple gate? You can’t take it with you. Having someone else’s money is a responsibility and brings obligations. Someone who has money can do what they like with it. It is hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. There is a case that it is the most frequently addressed Gospel topic.

But money is also a symbol of something more significant and deeper – the human tendency to acquisitiveness – to having stuff. Though money is not addressed in the Ten Commandments, we are told that we should not steal – take what is not our own, and we should not covet – the desire for what is not our own can also be toxic. That is to address the negative side of things. The monastic vow of poverty sets aside possessions and seeks to rob them of power, but it does not take our desires away. The early Christians shared all things in common, but our 39 Articles of Religion say that this is not necessary for the Christian life. Not all of us are monks, and we all have stuff. The questions then are about what is good to own and enjoy what it is good to do with the things we have: how what we have serves the Kingdom of God. If we are fortunate enough to have good things, how are we thankful, how do we share? And there is a deeper question too – do the things we have and enjoy distort the way we think about the world, about wealth and about the people who do not have the same things? Do we think about our possessions as a gift or as something that is our right or due?

The Old Testament laws include the forgiving of debts and the restoration of land – the laws of Sabbath and Jubilee – which directly address acquisitiveness and seek to break up generational and dynastic unfairnesses. Whether they have ever been properly followed is another matter. Another Old Testament rule is the Tithe – the voluntary giving of the best tenth of everything first to God – to the work, in fact, of those set aside to serve God in the temple: another command that was abused on both sides, but which seeks to recover an understanding of what we have as a gift and to trigger a response of gratitude – gift and gratitude, not what is due and our duty – an act of the heart rather than an unwelcome obligation.

Sex

We don’t talk much about sex in Church, except we do. The whole of my adult lifetime in church has been taken up with issues of sex, not as the common discourse of after church coffee, but a constant background to church life – whether people who are divorced should be able to remarry, and what about in church? What is the proper Christian response to homosexual men and women and to their public and private relationships. Issues which are theoretical for some of us touch on the deepest aspects of identity for others. Words can be cheap, and love can be hard to find. If we are to reflect on sex in the spirit of Lent, it is our own lives and passions which come into focus – not how we regulate the lives of others, but how we address the issues of our own.

One of the very first commands in the Bible is “be fruitful and multiply” – the growth and continuation of our species as a people created and loved by God is intended as a joyful outworking of the creative instinct, which is part of the image of God in us. Sadly the abuse of the associated passions is so strong and prevalent that regulation becomes necessary. As with possessions, our desires can so easily fix on the wrong things, and the intensity of desire can distort our moral judgment.

Regulation of sex includes the command “thou shalt not commit adultery”. It is a common thought that the Biblical idea (some say “doctrine”) of marriage is, and always has been, one man, one woman for life. And this is certainly a widely held ideal. But the Old Testament contains many stories where the purposes of God are taken forward in very different kinds of relationships. To mention a handful, the twelve tribes of Israel were founded on the descendants of Jacob/Israel. His twelve sons had four mothers, only two of whom were his wives. His interactions with their servant girls apparently did not count as adultery. And Jacob’s wives were acquired in an unusual fashion – you can read the story in Genesis. Just as reading the gospels with eyes open to money as a theme, reading parts of the Old Testament with eyes open to sex and marriage as a theme can lead to some interesting insights. Then Ruth, the Moabite woman, is acquired by duty by Boaz as his wife – not our own custom for marriage, but an arrangement designed to give Ruth’s first husband a continuing family. The practice is echoed in a discussion Jesus has with the Sadducees about marriage. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and was not killed for his sin, but marriage followed and the relationship sat at the heart of the kingdom. Their son Solomon had many wives himself and concubines too. More troubling to me is the story of Esther – a Bible book which we do not seem to read frequently or well. Esther displaces an existing wife to save God’s people – which is obviously seen as a good thing.

The practical challenges of sexual behaviour are found also in the New Testament – Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is addressed to a community which seems to lack a stable practice of marriage. But the point is that it is very easy to examine and critique the behaviour and desires of others, and in doing so to divert attention – and our own proper attention – from any disorder in our own passions. Our own deepest, most private and intimate thoughts sometimes escape examination. I guess Sigmund Freud would call this repression and point to the dangers of the accumulated unresolved energy escaping in uncontrolled and potentially destructive ways. That is not so different from the Christian account, except that it misses the beginning of it all in joyful creativity. Self-deception is easy: truthful self-examination can be very hard indeed. The question of how our passions serve the Kingdom of God was answered by the monks “by diverting our whole passion to God’s service”, but that rather depends on a calling and vocation – the gift of a discipline by which such a life can be lived.

Power

There is a lot of talk these days about human autonomy and human rights. The implied power and right to choose will often impact on the powers and rights of others, and negotiating conflict is the inevitable consequence. If I try to live simply by doing everything I want to do – everything I first think of – I will quickly run into trouble: I will annoy and hurt others and may find myself badly treated in response. I have never much liked the idea of human rights as a general thing – it makes it too easy for me to claim my own without attending to the rights of others. As a tool in the hands of more powerful people to assist those who have little or no power, human rights can be very well focussed on addressing real harm, but they can also be a very attractive invitation to be selfish.

If we look at the Ten Commandments, two address power issues, but in radical ways. The first is the assertion that we have one God and are to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength – that is an unqualified acknowledgement of a power greater than our own. And “thou shalt do no murder” tells us that we are not to take power over the life of another human being. These things seem big and remote in relation to the power issues which impinge on daily life – domestically, at school and in the workplace, or in the conflicts of the world where might so often seems to be thought to be right. And yet the monastic vow of obedience anchors daily life in the acknowledgement of a

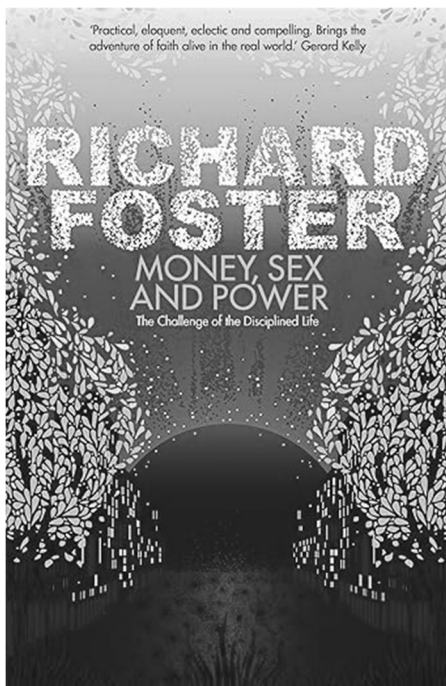
power greater than our own – God’s power mediated by those God has put in authority over us. That authority, of course, gets abused – the crucifixion of Jesus is one example of that abuse. But the trajectory of the whole Biblical narrative sees powerful abusers and dynasties eventually cast aside: God’s purpose triumphs. Victims litter the pages too, but God is on the side of the victim. Perhaps I will write more on this subject another time. It is very attractive, after all to take the position of a victim – but the reflection we are invited to make is on the power we have and the use we make of it, so that we do not multiply the cast of victims by our own actions. One of the most human traits is to deny that we have power – but we all do, and how we use it, and how our use of power serves God’s kingdom is perhaps the most challenging reflection of the three.

Making a rule of life

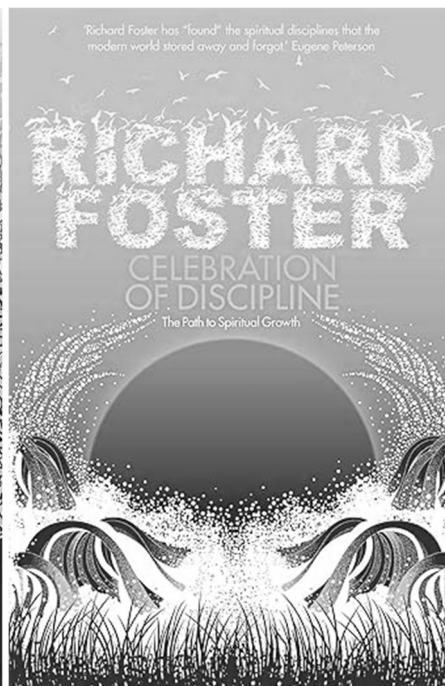
The monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are an attempt to address the sources of some of our deepest temptations. They form part of a rule of life, which would also include prayer and service elements to it. The advantage of such a rule is that it codifies our reflections and gives us boundaries and markers by which we know whether we are in danger of going wrong. It can direct our attention to God’s kingdom and God’s will rather than simply our own. Although such a rule can be individual, it can be more powerful if it is shared – the Church is a community of people on the same journey of faith, and sharing with others can help us to be appropriately accountable. No human mechanism is ever perfect, of course, but shared fellowship can help to make a rule of life a joy rather than a burden and can help us to navigate the tough times when challenges come. So, what would be in your rule of life to address your deepest temptations? What would be in it to strengthen your love of God and neighbour? Why not give it some thought this Lent.

Mark

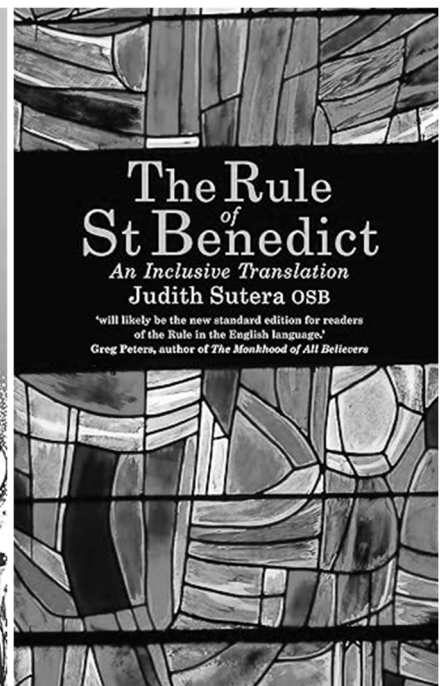
Some resources:



***Money, Sex and Power:
The Challenge of the
Disciplined Life***
Paperback – 19 Feb. 2009 by
Richard Foster



Celebration of Discipline
Paperback – 27 Nov. 2008 by
Richard Foster



***The Rule of St Benedict:
An Inclusive Translation***
Paperback – 27 May 2021 by
Judith Sutura osb

Who's Who in the Thatcham Team Ministry

Team Rector

Mark Bennet 867342

Team Vicar - St. Barnabas

Vacant

Associate Clergy:

Brenda Harland 865064

Angela Brennan 07498801479

Parish Administrator

Vacant

Parish Office

Email:

office.stmarysthattham@gmail.com

Churchwardens

Mike Watson 07766531038

Colin Waters 07985430769



Services at St. Mary's Church

Sundays

8.00 am Sunday Service

10.00 am Sunday Service

6.30 pm Sung Evensong
(1st Sundays only)

Wednesdays

9.45 am Holy Communion

10.30 am 'ABC' Adults, Babies, Children

Every Weekday

9.30 am Morning Prayer
(In the chapel)



St Mary's is fitted with an Induction Loop.
If you wear a hearing aid, switch to the 'T' position to benefit from the system

www.stmarysthattham.org.uk

Inspired by the love of Christ to build God's kingdom



Future copies

Connect is published throughout the year and is available from St. Mary's and St. Barnabas Churches, Thatcham, or by post from the Parish Office, tel. 864567.

Article Deadline

Please give articles for the **next April/May** edition to Steve Rice (860431) or any of the clergy or churchwardens or email julie@dunwell.org



Services at St. Barnabas Church

(Meeting in Thatcham Park School)

10.00 am Sunday Service

www.stbarnabasthattham.weebly.com

Serving to Build Community



For the Record...

December 2025 and January 2026

Baptism

21 December Cydney Thornbton-Dowling

21 December Lily Laing

Weddings

12 December Samantha Feeney and
Alister Holman

Funerals

8 December Ruth Palfrey (86)

13 January Gareth Davies (49)

14 January Alan Lovegrove (66)

27 January Rita Leroy (80)



West Berkshire Food Bank Shopping list

Urgently needed items

Fruit Juice

Oil

Tinned meat

UHT milk

Low on stock

Custard/rice pudding

Sponge puddings

Tinned fish

Tinned tomatoes

Dates for your diary

2 Feb Candlemas

CAMEO - 2 pm (every Monday)

3 Feb **Baby Café** - 10.30-12.00pm, Old Bluecoat School (every Tuesday, term time only)

4 Feb **A B C** - 10.30-11.45 am (every Wednesday, **no meeting 18 Feb, 2 Apr or 9 Apr**)

18 Feb **Ash Wednesday**

1 Mar **Evensong** – 6.30 pm

15 Mar **Mothering Sunday**

22 Mar **Healing Service** – 4.00 pm St. Mary's

29 Mar **Palm Sunday** (Joint Service with URC – starting at St. Mary's)

Holy week

30 Mar **Service** – 8.00 pm St. Mary's

31 Mar **Service** – 8.00 pm St. Mary's

1 Apr **Healing Service** – 8.00 pm St. Mary's

2 Apr **Maundy Thursday** – 8.00 pm St. Mary's

3 Apr **Good Friday, Last Hour** – 2.00 pm

4 Apr **Saturday Service of Easter Light** – 8.00 pm

Easter (5 April)



All Change

The process for choosing a new Bishop of Oxford has begun, and the Diocese has invited us to pray. You can find more details on the Diocesan website.

Almighty God, giver of every good gift:

Look graciously on your Church and illuminate our path as we seek a new Bishop.

Help us to work together for the good of your kingdom and all who live, work and study in the Diocese of Oxford.

Give wisdom and listening hearts to those who have influence.

Send out your Holy Spirit to call one who will faithfully teach, pastor, care for and equip us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

<https://oxford.anglican.org/who-we-are/how-we-are-governed/diocesan-synod/vacancy-in-see/prayer/>

Also

Alison Webster, headteacher of Thatcham Park School, is retiring this summer. Please do pray for the process for finding her replacement – the school is the largest organisation bearing the name of the Church of England in our parish, and it matters greatly how the school serves our community, including some of the most disadvantaged parts of West Berkshire.

Mark



Prayers

Loving Heavenly Father,

As we move through 2026, you know that we may well have the same worries or troubles that we had in previous times or are even facing new ones that have presented themselves this year.

Just like any other year, we may be anxious and uncertain as to whether we will cope, asking ourselves what this new year will bring us;

Whatever it is Lord, we pray that you would strengthen us in ways that we cannot do for ourselves; especially when we need that extra help which comes from your inexhaustible supplies of grace, mercy and love. May we rejoice and give thanks always for all that you give us :

As we commemorate Candlemas, that time when Jesus was presented in the temple, we praise and thank you for sending him into the world to show us how to live and how to love.

And as we move into Lent, may we reflect on our faith journey as we ready ourselves for Easter.



In our fractured, hurting world, we see the foolish decisions and actions made by leaders which can affect us all. Those hell-bent on getting their own way. Lord, we pray for peace and calm wherever there is war or civil commotion and for future conflicts to stop before they start.

It seems that your message of love and goodwill has been and is being ignored - the consequence of which is misery and unspeakable suffering throughout the globe.

We continue asking for your divine intervention to bring an end to the destruction and pain that we see bombarding us every single day via the media.

Come Lord, Prince of Peace, and bring healing to the nations.



We lift to you the ongoing work of your church as it seeks to share your message of love and hope to all who will listen. Our prayer is for those working in hostile and dangerous places who risk persecution, imprisonment, torture or death for daring to share the Good News.

May they receive your protection as you guide them through danger while they trust in your provision.

We raise up our churches in Thatcham asking for your blessing, wisdom and inspiration to be conferred on all clergy. Pour out your Spirit on each person as they work to make a difference.

We pray for Sarah Mullally, the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury. Help her to lead with integrity and honesty as she champions the causes of those without a voice and brings reform to the Church.



We pray for all who suffer mentally, physically, spiritually. May each one know your healing, wholeness and peace and draw closer to a God who has fearfully and wonderfully made us all.

We give thanks for our Christian brethren who have died and are with you now. When our time comes, may we with them, enjoy eternal peace.

Lord, we are forever in your debt. You sent Jesus to settle a debt He didn't owe to satisfy one we could never pay. Thank you!

Amen



For your diaries:

BEETLE DRIVE AND FISH & CHIP SUPPER

**to raise money for CHRISTIAN AID
Saturday 21st March 5.30pm
at the URC Hall**

Choice of Fish & Chips, Chicken & Chips
£10 per meal ticket (or 2 children can share)
or a donation without food
Bring your own drinks

Good food, fellowship & fun!

To book or for further details see Mary Baker
or Sarah Bennet
(sarah.bennet2@btinternet.com 07854
469043)



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A time of fun, making friends, singing, informal Christian worship, activities, drinks and homemade cakes

For the young at heart in our community

Inclusive and dementia friendly

Led by the Churches in Thatcham

Theme: There is a time for everything



Thursday, 19 February 2026

2.30pm – 4.00pm

Thatcham Methodist Church (RG18 4QL)

Come along or contact Karen on 07444 851606 or email karen.f@bhbcircuit.org.uk



**Carl Orff: *Carmina Burana*
Anton Bruckner: *Te Deum***

Conductor: Joe Tobin

Saturday 28th March 2026, 7:30pm St Nicolas Church, Newbury

**Tickets £18, 12-18 years & fulltime students 18-22 years £10, under 12s £5,
available online at www.newburychoral.org.uk and from choir members**