Candlemas 2026

If I were to ask you what words come to mind when I say Jesus, what would you say?

I think that if I asked this question in any church then I would get very similar answers. When we think of Jesus we often think of things such as "saviour", "King", "Lord" and other things, which are all very good in themselves. However, we hardly ever think of the human side of Jesus. When I ask what words come to mind when I say "Jesus", hardly anyone would reply with words such as "long hair", or "a robe dirty and mucky at the bottom from tramping around the Palestinian roads all day", or "bad breath". We often downplay the human side of Jesus. But her would have had all these things, we often forget about this because of images of him in stained glass, or in popular depictions of him on television.

The festival of Candlemas reminds us that Jesus was human. He started life as a baby, just like all of us do. Today we've heard how Simeon and Anna recognised Jesus. But there would have been many more people in the Temple that day than these. There would have been hundreds of people: perhaps other couples bringing their own children to be blessed or "redeemed", worshippers, traders waiting to set up their stalls, the Temple guard, in the court of the Gentiles (the outer part of the Temple) there may even have been Roman soldiers. Yet out of all these people only two recognised Jesus, Simeon and Anna. Al of the other people in the Temple that day (except perhaps the Roman Soldiers) were awaiting the coming messiah, yet when he was in their midst, they didn't recognise him. Perhaps like us they had specific ideas about what the Messiah would be, a little like our ideas of Jesus, and didn't recognise him in the person of a small baby in his mother's arms, probably crying and going red in the face at having to come out in the Jerusalem sunshine and heat. They missed him because their ideas of him were different to what they saw. Here was Jesus not as a full grown man, not as a powerful ruler or a king, but a small baby. God was in their midst but because they had different ideas about what he should look like, they missed the opportunity to experience his presence.

This should give us pause for thought: do we have the wrong picture of Jesus? Do we expect the perfectly coiffed hair and fancy robes we see in stained glass, and miss the human side of Jesus? The one with the calloused hands and the sore feet and the tiredness? The Jesus who may have smelled bad because he hadn't been able to bathe recently? Or who may have delivered the sermon on the mount with a little piece of food stuck in his teeth? I'm caricaturing here of course but you see what I mean. Are we in danger of focussing on a perfect image of Jesus instead of a realistic one? And therefore turning Jesus into something he wasn't?

We should ask ourselves how many times might we have missed God's presence or activity because it didn't look like what we were expecting? Often we expect God to act in big, dramatic ways, when in reality he acts through the small, and unexpected ways, ways which often go unnoticed in the midst of a busy life.

This Candlemas, in the midst of the drama of our liturgy and the hymns and readings, all of which are fine in themselves, let us remember God doesn't just act through this stuff. God also acts through the small, the everyday, the tiny moments. God acts in our lives everyday not in big miracles but in small moments that pass by in the blink of an eye.

The tragedy of the Temple that day was not that God was absent, but that God was present and so few noticed. So as we leave this place today, may we go alert rather than hurried, open rather than certain, expectant rather than distracted.
May we learn to recognise Jesus not only in the holy and the beautiful, but in the human, the fragile, and the ordinary. We may discover, to our surprise, that God has been with us all along.
Amen.