

Reliable sources regularly report that Lily can be seen enjoying a hot chocolate and Fr Samuel a rather more substantial breakfast at a certain artisanal bakery on the corner of Oakley Street and the Kings Road. I'm sure it brings comfort and pleasure to this part of the Rylands family.

Doubtless Frances and Fred also have their comfort routine- and who knows where the cousins Jos and Gabriel whom we baptize this morning, will find their own pleasures.

It always strikes me that these words we hear today are rather like that comforting hot chocolate or almond croissant, the words of the Nunc Dimittis. You will hear them sung again this morning as we move to the font, you can hear them sung here

every Sunday afternoon in Evensong and you can pray them every day at evening prayer as set in the prayer book, as well as hearing them at every funeral. Simeon, speaks, when he meets Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child,

‘Lord now you let your servant go in peace

According to your word

For my eyes have seen your salvation

Which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples’

The familiar cadences of the text act as a gentle lullaby, they ease us into slumber. Simeon has long craved the comfort of what he sees in this 40 day old baby- salvation, healing, now seems in sight for

his people. But we mistake the man if we equate his words to hot chocolate and croissant.

Comfort isn't the mood music of his words when we stop to consider the fulness of this encounter, his words as he holds this child in his arms. His words paint an altogether darker picture- the coming of the messenger, as the prophet reminded us, is utterly different- it is of challenge, 'who can stand when he appears?' - he will be like a refiner's fire, like the scouring of fuller's soap. The promise is far from comfortable. And his words to Mary too, strange and threatening, promise 'a sword to pierce her own heart' for this child is 'destined for the falling and rising of many' This Jesus will be a sign of contradiction, a stumbling block, for perhaps no truth can ever be received without opposition.

It is into this risky promise that we baptise Jos and Gabriel today- not into comfortableness or security, not into swaddling or guaranteed success, but into the way of Christ. It was into that same risky promise that we were baptised too.

At every baptismal preparation evening in this parish we talk about baptism as being a step on the way. That's what christians were first called, people of the The Way, and we are baptized into that way the Christ-like way. This sacrament is not so much about casting out original sin or securing from limbo, or any other dubious construct, but it is first and foremost about dying and rising, washed anew into another way of being and living , the Christ-like way.

And that is the key to Simeon's strange words too. For The Way is often far from clear, far from secure. Simeon's words are carefully used by Luke, 'Now' he says- right now, you can let your servant go in peace, because after all the years of slog he has this Jesus in his hands, whose very name and life mean salvation- wholeness. 'And let your servant go'- is the echo of Moses' plea 'let my people go', the plea is not to drift off into the sunset, no far from it, it is the plea of a slave being freed, it is manumission, chains breaking, freedom into a new life, a fully human life. This is not comfort, but liberation into a new Way of being, God's way of being, incarnational being, life in all its fullness.

Into this Way we baptize Gabriel and Josiah today, into this we were baptised, into this way Simeon,

holds the Christ in his hands, as we do when we receive Christ in the host, in every eucharist.

Some of you will know that Fr Samuel's PhD work involves a 20thC theologian called Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who returned to Germany from a period abroad, including in London, and took the risky decision to establish a seminary for training clergy for the German church in opposition to the doctrines and practice of Naziism. He was of course, eventually arrested, imprisoned and killed. But he, like Simeon understood the need to take the risky path, he recognised that to be baptised means to take the place of Christ in the world.

And that is our prayer in this sacrament of Baptism today- not for the hot chocolate and croissant moment, but that wherever life may lead them, Josiah and Gabriel may know themselves to be on Christ's way, taking Christ's place in the world, as it must also be our own prayer too. Only then will we come to understand Simeon's plea that we may be freed to go out in God's peace to be a light for all peoples.