

**Keeping in Touch**  
**Welford on Avon Methodist Church**  
**January – February 2017**

I am somewhat astonished this year to note on the Internet, that Methodists are included among those who celebrate the Feast of Candlemas. The members of the little Methodist Church where I grew up, with its roots in Primitive Methodism, would have been horrified. To them candles represented 'popery'! I sometimes wonder what their response would have been if they could have known that I would grow up to love candles. I have never been aware of any Methodist Candlemas celebration, but perhaps that is my ignorance!

In the church calendar, Candlemas on February 2<sup>nd</sup> commemorates the ritual purification of Mary, forty days after the birth of her son Jesus. This was seven days of being 'unclean' and a requirement to stay at home for another thirty three days. (Double that if the baby was a girl!) The mother would then visit temple or synagogue for the purification.

Candlemas also marks the ritual presentation of the baby Jesus to God in the Temple at Jerusalem. If the baby was the first born, and a boy, he had to be taken to temple or synagogue and 'bought back', because he belonged to God. The Gospel of Luke describes Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for this ceremony, where they redeemed him with the offering of the poor, two young pigeons.

It was there that Jesus was recognised by two very devout people, Anna and Simeon. Simeon held the baby Jesus and in the song known as the Nunc Dimittis, (from the Latin) stated his willingness to 'depart in peace' now that he had seen this special baby. Is it because Simeon foresaw Jesus as the Light of the World that on this day candles have a special meaning? Certainly in some churches candles, both for church and home use throughout the year are brought to church at Candlemas to be blessed.

For thirty years, there has been a very special custom regarding 'The International Peace Light' which is brought every year from the grotto in Bethlehem where the birth of Jesus is remembered. The light is flown to Austria and from there it travels across Europe and even crosses the Atlantic.

The special oil lamp is lit from a light which has been burning constantly for more than a thousand years in the grotto. Hundreds of lights are lit from this one lamp, spreading the light far and wide.

The scouting movement is very involved in this because they were challenged by their founder, Robert Baden-Powell, to be 'Messengers of Peace' after he'd witnessed the horror of the First World War. This spreading of light, from one source has become a hope-filled symbol of peace.

The desire for peace, so sorely needed in our troubled world, is perhaps at the root of the popularity of this symbolic action. Who would think that from one little light in Bethlehem, light could be spread so widely.

This year the light was brought into the Gloucester diocese and from Cheltenham it came to Chipping Campden, into St. James Church, but also into Mickleton Methodist Church, brought by a beaver, a cub and a scout. Their solemn faces as they lit our candles are mirrored in the many images of this custom on the Internet.

It was awesome to be part of this movement, but for it to make any real difference, those of us who were privileged to be part of it, and those we inspire by telling of it, need to play our part, however humble in spreading peace in our families, neighbourhood, churches, hopefully helping to create a more peaceful world. world. For many this is a Christmas event, but it must surely be equally relevant at Candlemas.

**Ros Murphy**



**Welford Methodist Church Services all at 11 am**

January 1<sup>st</sup> Mr Alan Cooper MW

January 8<sup>th</sup> Rev Brian Mason AC

January 15<sup>th</sup> Miss Paddy Beardsall MW

January 22<sup>nd</sup> No service

January 29<sup>th</sup> Mrs Sheila Brown

March 5<sup>th</sup> morning worship Mrs Sheila Brown

March 19<sup>th</sup> Rev Brian Mason

February 5<sup>th</sup> Mr James Steele MW

February 12<sup>th</sup> Rev Brian Mason HC

February 19<sup>th</sup> Miss Lilian Fitton MW

February 26<sup>th</sup> No service

March 12<sup>th</sup> Rev Ros Murphy Holy Communion

March 26<sup>th</sup>, no service at Welford.

MW – Morning Worship, AC Annual Covenant Service, HC Holy Communion

There are services at Stratford, Bidford and Mickleton on 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays, all at 10.30