

REFLECTION FOR CANDLEMAS – SUNDAY 1ST FEBRUARY

You may already know that I used to do a bit of folk singing. I was part of a little group called Galadriel back in the 1970's and we would go round the local folk clubs doing some unaccompanied singing in four part harmony. I was sometimes responsible for holding the bass line, but I found it very hard to keep to my notes and blend in with the others. The only way I could sing in tune with them was by putting my fingers in my ears, so I could hear myself more clearly at the same time as blotting the others out a bit. This was quite a stock in trade pose for some folkies in those days, so when people saw me do it – they probably thought I was trying to be cool, but the truth is I was trying desperately to keep to the right notes.

What I love about the early chapters of Luke's Gospel is the way in which the well known narratives of the birth of Jesus are interspersed with song. When Zechariah finally gets to name his son, John, he bursts forth with the Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79) – what a lovely tenor voice I imagine he had! When Mary learns she is to be the Mother of Our Lord, I imagine her sweet alto voice lilting out the words of Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55). When shepherds are roused from their slumbers by the song of the angels, (Luke 2: 14) I envisage a strong soprano/treble line filling the skies. Now, on this day of the Presentation of Christ In the Temple (Candlemas), the Christmas four part harmony choir is complete with the sonorous bass voice of Simeon as he sings the Nunc Dimmitis as his response to coming face to face with the infant king in the temple. (Luke 2: 22-40)

I don't think our calling as Christians involves us simply being a solo voice. I think rather that the whole purpose of the church is to perfect the very harmony with which the Good news of Jesus's birth was heralded. Each of us singing it out in our own way – not so much in unison, but with the pitch and style that is our God given gift. We may put our message across in different words as befits our differing life's experience – but the message is the same! He is Emmanuel. He is God with us. He has come amongst us to share his holiness and he rubs shoulders with us wherever we happen to be. We are called to sing this in as perfect a harmony as we can manage, not blotting one another out or sticking our fingers in our ears to concentrate on our part. In the end we are called to be a collective who can only but attract others with the beauty of our melodies.

Fr Andrew