

May I speak in the name of the father, son and holy spirit. Please be seated.

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Some might say that I was chosen by God to become Girl Bishop, as my name was drawn out of a hat from among the cathedral girl choristers. Last year, the first for many years here, was a boy, but now the church of England is allowing females bishops and they are letting us girls have a go. I was elected on 6 December, which those of you who remember my feature in last week's newsheet, told you that was in fact the feast of Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children. That's very appropriate and had maybe been thought about rather than a coincidence.

The child bishop idea comes from the middle ages when the monarch would pick a small person to act as King,

In fact, my other two online bibles, Wikipedia and google, tell me, the monarch picked a child who then made chaos but it also said that the child bishop only lasted until 28 December...you can't always believe wiki...

Perhaps you could say all the previous, possibly mischievous, boys, have also been chosen by God. Like Jesus, he was God's chosen son.

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In today's gospel, Simeon foresaw salvation in this little infant. So as Simeon thanked God and he looked at the tiny child's face he gave Mary a lot of information including she would feel "sorrow, like a sharp sword, and it would break through her own heart". Simeon spoke to Mary creating what has become known as the Nunc Dimittis. We sing this at every evensong - that's on a Tuesday if you want to hear the amazing girls' choir, not that I am biased or anything...

My favourite line from the Nunc Dimittis is "to become a light to lighten the gentiles". Simeon describes Jesus as a light, the light of the world, which reminds me of candles, not the electric type, or the glow sticks that are used at discos but the ones lit by striking a match. Jesus shone around the dark world, that was full of sins. By lighting a candle, it creates light which to me is a metaphorical way of expressing the crucifixion of Christ, that brought salvation into the world.

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On a recent journey, back from Kent my family and I were listening to Matilda the musical, this is a musical based off the book by Roald Dahl; it is one of my favourite musicals among many, but when you listen to the words you can take a big meaning from it... One of the songs, Miracle, has the lines, Every life is unbelievably unlikely.

The chances of existence, almost infinitely small.

The most common thing in life is life,

And yet every single life bearing new life is a miracle!

and I relate it to when Jesus was born because that is a miracle.

Another song talks about two stories and a nursery rhyme but the verse that struck me was about the story of Romeo and Juliet, in the time when these characters are based fate was everything (and the thing they believed in most) and in a way, it still is. Life is based off fate, for better or for worse. Everything in life happens for a reason, we can't change that, it would be a complete waste of time and effort even trying to change it but every cloud has a silver lining. Jesus knew that, he understood he had to be salvation, bearing the sins, he knew he had to die to enlighten our world. No point denying that, am I right?

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I thought I should also mention a little about what Candlemas is. The festival is called Candlemas because this was the day that all the Church's candles for the year were blessed. On Candlemas night, many people place lighted candles in their windows at home. Like some other Christian festivals, Candlemas draws some of its elements from Paganism. In pre-Christian times, it was the festival of light. This ancient festival marked the midpoint of winter, half way between the shortest day of winter and the spring equinox. Some people lit candles to scare away evil spirits on the dark winter nights. Indeed, some people believed that Candlemas predicted the weather for the rest of the winter – you may have heard this poem:

If Candlemas day be fair and bright, winter will have another fight, if
Candlemas day brings cloud and rain, winter won't come again.

It seems quite bright/cloudy outside today – but I am not John Ketley, Michael Fish or Carol Kirkwood so will leave you to decide if this is true or not!

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I have a little challenge for everyone. Today I challenge you to interact with someone who you do not know, even if it is a smile or a hello, or maybe a compliment, make this place of beauty also a place of welcome and light. Maybe you could congratulate a child taking their first communion. Maybe you could even tell a brownie, guide, cub or scout how smart they look. Make a difference to someone else's life or help someone in need. After all, Jesus made a difference to the world. As the children of God, we should also make a difference to make this world a lighter place.

Remember what Matilda said: you mustn't let a little thing like, 'little' stop you.... But also, nobody else is gonna put it right for me, Nobody but me is gonna change my story and quite honestly, Sometimes you have to be a little bit naughty

Of course, this also reminds us of Jesus in the temple when he was 12 – he was naughty as he hadn't told his parents where he was....in fact it is the passage that follows our gospel reading today, but I will leave someone else to preach on that some other time. Even though he was little he could still do a lot.... however, before you young'uns all go home say the bishop said you could be naughty, in this context it is stirring things up to make a difference...not pulling the cats tail or your sisters hair!

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To end back on the Candlemas theme, after a moment of silence, I am going to close with a prayer written by an African school girl:

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O thou great chief

Light a candle in my heart

That I may see what is therein

And sweep the rubbish from thy dwelling place.

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Amen.