

Reflections about hope, snowdrops and Anna by Elizabeth Bryson



Snowdrops are known as 'Candlemas flowers', because they are usually seen at Candlemas on 2nd February, and are a symbol of **hope**. Snowdrops give **hope** that spring is coming after a long, cold winter. At Candlemas we rejoice and celebrate that Jesus has come to be the light of the world and 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles,' (*Luke 2:32*) so that we can know more of the love of Jesus.

Four years ago, while the packers were busy loading our belongings into the removal van at our house in Maidenhead, I wrote an article for the February edition of the Parish Magazine of our new Parish, St Michael & All Angels' Maidstone, where my husband is the Vicar. I wrote about snowdrops, **hope** and Candlemas. We were looking forward with great **hope** to our time in Maidstone. I hoped to share the love of Jesus in Care Homes in the Parish as Care Home Ministry had become an increasingly important part of my ministry as a Licensed Lay Minister and Reader. In 2017 I had not heard about Anna Chaplaincy. I was pleased to lead monthly Services at Abbeyrose, Lukestone and The Poplars Care Homes in our Parish in Maidstone.

I first heard about Anna Chaplaincy at a meeting at the Hospice in January 2018, with Julia Burton-Jones, who said I was doing the role of an Anna Chaplain. At the Workshop exploring Anna Chaplaincy with Older People in April 2019 I felt strongly that the Lord was calling me to this ministry. It was a joy to be commissioned as an Anna Chaplain by Bishop Tim at Canterbury Cathedral on 22nd September 2019. Candlemas is a special time for Anna Chaplains.

I continue in Lockdown to lead Telephone and Skype Services at Abbeyrose, Lukestone and The Poplars. In December I coordinated across Maidstone to be sure that all the 24 Care Homes had Church contact and a Christmas Service via Telephone, Skype, Zoom or a DVD. These Christmas Services gave **hope** and reassurance of the love and presence of Jesus.

The Gospel for Candlemas from Luke 2: 22-40 describes a wonderful event when Jesus was 40 days old; when Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem for the first time. They were keeping the Jewish law for three ceremonies: the purification of the mother, the redemption of the first born and the presentation of the child to the service of God. It was a very special day for Anna!

Anna and Simeon are a wonderful example of **hope**, waiting many years trusting that they would see Jesus, who came to bring salvation and reveal God's love to the world. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon 'that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ.' (v. 26) That day 'moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts' (v.27) and recognised that Jesus was the One he had been waiting and **hoping** to see. Anna recognised Jesus too, after sixty years of waiting, hoping and praying in the temple, when she prayed much and **hoped** for the coming of Jesus. Anna's **hope** turned to joy when she recognised Jesus.

Anna shared the good news as she 'spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.' (v.38) As Anna Chaplains we share the good news of the love and presence of Jesus; giving **hope** and reassurance to the elderly.

Jesus came as a light in the darkness, just as the snowdrops are bright and white in the dark soil. The hymn *Great is Thy Faithfulness* reminds us that God gives us 'strength for today and bright **hope** for tomorrow'.

In these dark days of the coronavirus pandemic let us 'set our **hope**' (2 Corinthians 1:10) in God to help us through difficult times. **Hope** is 'an anchor for the soul'. (Hebrews 6: 19) We can trust in God's love and faithfulness through troubled stormy times.

*Will your anchor hold in the storms of life, when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain, will your anchor drift or firm remain?
We have an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*

Anna lived in a stormy time of fear with the Romans invading her Country. She kept praying, hoping and trusting God. Her **hope** was an anchor trusting in the love of God. In the Bible 'hope' is a confident expectation and anticipation of good. To **hope** means that we are trusting God. Indeed 'faith is being sure of what we **hope** for and certain of what we do not see.' (Hebrews 11: 1)

When you see snowdrops in February may they be a symbol of **hope** for you: hope in the wonderful love and faithfulness of the Lord while you trust 'that in all things God works for the good of those who love him'. (Romans 8: 28) Let us be glad and full of **hope**, like Anna, when we see beautiful white snowdrops. Anna Chaplains are bringers of hope; reminding older people about the love and presence of Jesus.

Here is a prayer I have written for the February 2021 Canterbury Diocesan Calendar of Prayer:

God of healing and hope, we ask that those living in Care Homes will know your sustaining peace and presence. Draw near to the isolated and those living alone. Thank you that nothing can separate them from your love. Come close to those who have lived long and experienced much. Let the fearful know that you are with them in this coronavirus storm. Please protect all who live and work in Care Homes. Through telephone, internet, television and radio services, remind them that Jesus loves them. May they all know your peace, joy and loving presence today and every day. Amen