

Sunday 1 February – Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Sermon by Christine Newmarch

An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons (tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk))

It seems sometimes as though today is almost two celebrations in one: celebrating the presentation of the baby Jesus in the temple, and a festival of light.

In the church calendar it signifies the very end of the lengthy Christmas season. The time when we turn from the crib towards the cross, and we look to the 40 days of Lent.

It is the last we hear of Jesus' infancy, apart from his boyhood adventure staying on in the very same place to discuss scripture with others. It would be many years before his public ministry began. Some scholars now believe that he may have been closer to 40 than 30 when his ministry started.

In taking Jesus to the Temple, Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the Jewish requirement to dedicate their first-born son to the Lord. It reminds us of Hannah taking Samuel to the temple and giving him for ever to the priest Levi as a Nazarite.

But Mary and Joseph, through dedicating him to the Lord were paying a ransom to bring him home again with them. This was why they took a pair of doves. This lowly gift was not an indication of his worth but their poverty.

In the Temple they met Simeon and Anna. Anna is called a prophet. The only female prophet in the New Testament, she links the Old Testament with the New. No doubt she was a wise old woman. She understood the situation but did not comment except to praise God and then began to tell people in the temple who were looking for redemption about the child she had seen.

So, let's focus on Simeon's words. He was a righteous man, filled with the Holy Spirit, and recognised the infant Jesus as the Messiah. The Messiah he had longed to see.

Simeon declared that Jesus was the one bringing salvation for all peoples: a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to God's people Israel.

We know too that Simeon was right in saying that Jesus would be opposed, that some would accept him and others not, and also about the pain which Mary would have to bear.

It is Simeon's words that Jesus would be a light for all the world which brings the two themes of the presentation in the Temple and a Festival of Light together in Candlemas.

Candlemas is widely celebrated as a "festival of light" with many different traditions around the world.

These include the blessing of candles and eating crepes in France, and parts of Germany and Switzerland. The pancakes are in remembrance of those given to pilgrims arriving in Rome at the end of the 5th Century.

In France and Belgium, the Crib is not put away until Candlemas – and we still have ours here in church today.

In Germany Candlemas was traditionally the beginning of the farmers' year – rather like our Plough Sunday, but it was also associated with regular payment dates, and with the end of the servants' year. It was the day on which any outstanding wages were paid. This custom made it difficult for servants to change employer at any other time of year, just as many working in commerce today are tied to the date on which annual bonuses are paid.

Traditions around bears waking from their slumber are associated with Candlemas, and it was through German settlers in the USA that the groundhog day ceremonies came about.

Hungary and Romania have a rich array of Candlemas traditions, including children dressing as bears, lighting candles and eating/ honey.

In Luxembourg Candlemas is a holiday centred around children. They roam the streets

In Spain, the Canary Islands, Puerto Rico, Peru and other Catholic countries it remains the tradition to focus on the Virgin Mary, the message she received from Simeon, and to parade statues of the Virgin of Lights through the streets ending at a church service.

There are many other traditions, some with bears, snowdrops, all kinds of food, and , in Mexico even dressing dolls, but light is central to most and very important.

Christ is the light of the world, and Candlemas symbolises light and renewal for the whole world.

We know that the world needs light, God's light, today as much as it did two thousand years ago. In celebrating Candlemas today, we are joining in spirit with Christian people around the world, both near and far.

Maybe our celebrations here seem rather muted in comparison, but in our prayers and our Eucharist we are joined with Christian people all over the world giving thanks for Jesus. Together it is our prayer for his light to shine in everyone.

Amen.