

## Candlemas

29 1 17

Almighty and ever-living God,  
clothed in majesty,  
whose beloved Son  
was this day presented in the Temple,  
in substance of our flesh:  
grant that we may be presented to you,  
with pure and clean hearts  
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our text may be found in the King James translation of today's gospel from Luke chapter 2 and is verse 32:

“a light to reveal you to the Gentiles  
and the glory of your people, Israel.’

February 2<sup>nd</sup> is the Feast of Candlemas, the day on which we mark the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 40 days after the birth of her first-born son, Jesus.

Candlemas is a mediaeval tradition. According to my ‘Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable’, the candles to be used in church that year are brought in to be blessed by the priest. In the dark days of early February, when winter is still very much with us, it seems good to lift the spirits with another festival of light. But

since Candlemas falls on a Thursday this year, it seems good to me that we can transfer it to the Sunday before so that more of us can join in a light-centred ceremony.

So let me ask you, do you ? Do you light candles ? At home, do you light a candle from time to time ? Do you ever come into church and light a candle on the beautiful candle-stand that the Marshalls had made for us in their native Yorkshire ?

But if you do, why do you ? Why light a candle ? I think a candle is a prayer-focus. The act of lighting the candle is part of the prayer we might want to pray as we strike the match. As we stand there, looking at the flickering light, our mind is focused as we articulate our thoughts, offering up a silent prayer to God our Father through the power of His Holy Spirit and in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And when we have finished and move away, the candle we've just lit is still there burning bright, a symbol of the prayer we have just said. The lit candle we leave burning is a mark, a sign that someone has been in this sacred space and, in this special place, has spent time in prayer. Oh, and by the way, David Morgan, our Treasurer, told me that last year, the free-will offerings from folk burning candles here in St Bart's raised over 500€ for church funds.

So why did the Church decide that there should be a special day to bless the candles to be used in church that year ? Because Candlemas, the presentation of Christ in the Temple, is a festival of light. Simeon has been promised that he would not die till he had beheld the Messiah face-to-face. That day, when Mary

and Joseph had brought their baby boy to the Temple, Simeon was inspired by the Holy Spirit to go there himself and, sure enough, he saw Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus there and he knew who it was that he was looking at. He took the baby in his arms and prophesied. His words are what we know as the 'Nunc Dimittis' and contain the words of our text today:

‘a light to reveal you to the Gentiles  
and the glory of your people, Israel.’

Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus brings light in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome that light. Whatever dark deeds evil may perpetrate in the world today, yesterday or tomorrow, the way, the truth and the life, that the light of Christ illuminates, can never be extinguished, devalued, dissed.

So why not light a candle and be truly light-hearted ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

*29<sup>th</sup> January 2017*

G: Sermons 35 : Candlemas

