

## Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas)

Mal 3:1-4

Heb 2:14-18

Lk 2:22-40

Today's feast has many names – The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and Candlemas, focussing on Jesus as the light to the Gentiles.

Forty days after the birth of a male child, a Jewish mother was required to be ritually purified and make an offering so that she could pick up the threads of life in her community. The offering Mary made in the Temple was that required of a poor person, namely, two turtledoves and if they were not available, two pigeons. This offering completed her purification.

The second ceremony of this visit was the presentation of their first male child to God, as Samuel was. Originally this was to recruit males for the Jewish priesthood, but when that became restricted to members of the tribe of Levi, all first born males were still offered to God but redeemed by the offering of a monetary gift to the Temple treasury. St Luke makes no mention in his gospel of this being offered for Jesus, so Jesus belonged to God and remained in His service. This is why He could say to His parents when they found Him in the Temple at aged 12, "Do you not know I must be in my Father's house?"

The Holy Family was obedient to Jewish Law and so enabled the prophecy of Malachi to be fulfilled. It was he who said who said that the Lord would appear in His Temple in order to judge the people for their unfaithfulness to God. During this visit, two holy people, Simeon and Anna, recognised the true identity of the child Jesus. Simeon had been told by God that before he died, he would see God's chosen one who would reconcile God's people to himself. Simeon took Jesus into his arms and sang the song which we know as the *Nunc Dimittis* which is said during Evensong. In this song, Simeon describes Jesus as a light to the Gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel. In the Old Testament these descriptions are reserved to God alone.

Apart from giving thanks to God for Jesus, Simeon tells Mary that the victory of salvation that Jesus would accomplish will not be an easy victory. Not only that, Mary herself would suffer because of her love for her son. "A sword shall pierce your own soul," said Simeon. Once again, Luke presents Mary as the image of suffering discipleship. Serious disciples will be humbled and tread the path of suffering before ascending the hill of the Lord to attend the heavenly banquet.

Simeon's prophecy about Jesus is reinforced in the Epistle to the Hebrews which makes it clear that only someone who is divine can break the power of evil and its chaos, so enabling those who choose to do so, to redirect their life from self-centredness to God-centredness.

So today's feast is like the Roman god Janus, after whom January is named, who faces forwards and backwards at the same time. Today's feast looks backwards to the events surrounding Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, reminding us of Jesus' true identity, and it looks

forward to the heavy cost of His victory on the Cross for our salvation.

Every time we offer the Mass we look back to that victory on the Cross as we represent Jesus' sacrifice and look forward to the heavenly banquet when God's Kingdom will be fulfilled.

Candlemas also reminds us of the cost of discipleship. If we love Jesus, like Mary we will suffer because that is the nature of love. Today's feast marks the end of the Christmas season and begins our journey towards Lent, Holy Week and Easter. Today we shift gear, and the first step is to prepare for Lent by thinking about our Lenten disciplines.

Holy Candlemas calls us to rejoice that Christ is the light of the world through being our wounded healer.

*Msgr Harry Entwistle*  
*Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025*