

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
February 2, 2020—Candlemas
Feast of the Presentation in the Temple
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater

Malachi 3:1-4; Psalm 84; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

“Lumen ad revelationem... A light for revelation” †

As you may have noticed by our weather, this week marks the beginning of the end of the dark of the winter season... its Ground Hog Day in the US, and in the Celtic tradition (especially in Scotland and Ireland) yesterday was St. Brigid's Day, highlighting the coming of Spring. Long ago, the Church encouraged its members to give thanks for the sources of light that are given to us... For centuries, the Church asked its members to bring forth candles, the most common source of light, to be blessed on this day, to help protect from darkness and harm... and as a remembrance of the ONE who was, according to Simeon, 'a light for revelation,' who was presented in the Temple. This particular Sunday came to be known as 'Candlemas' – remembering the light in the midst of darkness. A day to remember "the Light of the world."

Today we celebrate 'The feast of the presentation of the Lord in the temple and the purification of the Virgin Mary,' and we recall an event, which is said to have taken place 40 days following the birth of Jesus. Forty days was a special time according to Jewish Law. It's when a woman, who had delivered a child, would become ritually pure again. After 40 days, a new mother was restored to full health and vitality, supposedly rested from her labors and able to return to her normal cycle in life. And so, she was allowed back into public life and common worship, permitted back in the Temple precincts. And the Law proscribed that she and her new infant should present themselves to the Temple for prayer and sacrificial offerings. These ancient ceremonies of 'the purification for the mother' and 'the presentation of the infant' would likely be separate events, yet both reflect the conviction that *life and children are a gift from God*. So, we have the setting....

Mary, Joseph, and their newborn infant went to the Temple to do what was 'ordinary' in the life of a Jewish family of their age. They participated in the common rituals of their faith, rituals that in many ways are not unlike our own ceremonial acts and religious celebrations today. The author of Luke uses literary doublets, carefully juxtaposing two different purity rites (purification of a woman and temple presentation) and the interpretation of these rites by two different prophetic witnesses—Simeon and Anna. Two very different people, of very different backgrounds, yet similar in their faith; they were doing what they ordinarily did every day, praying in the Temple. And then, this family caught their attention. A young family seeking God's blessing of their child, through ritual sacrifice that was so common in their day. A family doing what seemed natural and ordinary, thanking God for the new life they had received in the birth of their son, Jesus. And, something extraordinary occurred... *an extra-ordinary event in the midst of the ordinary*. Anna and Simeon simultaneously noticed God's presence in that infant and announced the 'redemption of Jerusalem' and 'the salvation of Israel.' Two holy people saw the

light of God in the midst of the darkness. ‘Lumen ad revelationem... A light for revelation.’

The message for us on today, the feast of Candlemas, is that that light is still present, even in the darkest of times and in the darkest of places. The light often comes in ways that are difficult for most ordinary people to see. So often we don’t recognize God’s presence around us. We must be open to the diversity of voices and the diversity of messages that come to us... some, in the most unexpected of places. It’s often hard for ordinary people to notice the light, when we’re overwhelmed by the hardships that darken our lives. Encouraged by the story of Anna and Simeon, we know that we can recognize the light... if we remain watchful for the extra-ordinary in the midst of the ordinary. We can see, both inside of and outside of this church, the ‘good news’ of God’s salvation— the acceptance of others, and the liberation of all through Jesus Christ!

May the candles you take home, that we bless today, remind you of God’s love for *you*. These candles are a symbol of God’s love, always! From this day forward, may we always strive to see the light, and to be aware of God’s presence, wherever and whenever it is revealed! †