

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On Monday we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, traditionally known as Candlemas.

Also known as the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is the formal end of the Christmas season. This observance occurs exactly 40 days after Christmas, aligning with Jewish law as described in Leviticus 12 and Exodus 13, which required a woman's ritual purification after childbirth, and the presentation of a firstborn son to God. According to the Gospel of Luke (2:22-40), Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Temple, where they offered the sacrifice prescribed for poor people: two turtledoves or pigeons. If you look closely at portrayals of this event in Christian art, you will often see St Joseph carrying a cage holding these two pigeons.

Once in the temple, the elderly Simeon recognized Jesus as the Messiah, proclaiming him "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel," while the prophetess Anna also gave witness. From Simeon's beautiful words we associate this feast (like we do with Epiphany) with the celebration of Christ as light of the world.

The feast was first documented in the 4th century in Jerusalem by St. Cyril of Jerusalem. By the 5th century, it spread to Constantinople and the Emperor Justinian formalized it as a major festival. In the West, Pope Sergius I introduced it to Rome around 701 AD, emphasizing candle processions to symbolize Christ's light dispelling darkness. The name "Candlemas" derives from the custom of blessing candles on this day, a practice formalized in the 11th century.

The candle blessing and procession evoke Simeon's words, signifying purification, enlightenment, and the transition from darkness to light and from the Old to New Covenant.

In many Catholic churches, a solemn procession with lighted candles precedes Mass, where beeswax candles are blessed for home use against storms or illness. It is also a foreshadowing of the great Easter Vigil at which the Holy Fire and Pascal Candle are blessed, and the darkened church is illuminated by the Light of Christ.

We will celebrate this feast at OLR with a special service of choral Evensong at 4 pm on Sunday (ending in time for the 5 pm Mass) and on Monday morning with a School Mass, at which candles will be solemnly blessed and children from each grade in the school will process with lighted candles. We invite you to bring candles to be blessed which you will use at home. The candles should be placed on the table in the Narthex before Mass.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker