

Sunday 2nd Feb 2025; Feast of the Presentation of Jesus Christ/Candlemas; Benefice BCP Holy Communion, Stonegrave

Today is the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple also called Candlemas. The name “Candlemas” derives from the practice of blessing and lighting candles during the service on this day. These candles symbolize the light of Christ, dispelling the darkness both literally and spiritually. In churches and homes alike, candles are lit and blessed during a special ceremony. These blessed candles are believed to bring protection, warmth, and blessings into the home throughout the coming year. When you arrived today you were given a candle, which we joined together to light, symbolizing the fact that as we begin Candlemas, we are transported to a place where tradition and spirituality come together. Candlemas is a time when we pause to reflect on the circle of the seasons, to embrace the light within us, and to look forward to the arrival of spring. So, today as we light our candles and share in this timeless tradition, let us be reminded that the warmth of Candlemas continues to illuminate our lives, year after year.

The Presentation of Christ is a major feast in our calendar. It commemorates the events recorded by Luke in today’s gospel reading. Jesus’ parents Mary and Joseph brought him to the temple forty days after his birth to conform to Jewish ritual obligations—the presentation of the first-born to God; and the purification of a woman after giving birth. This Presentation draws our attention backwards, to Christmas. In a very real sense, it is the final observance of the Christmas season, which explains why in many homes and churches, the Christmas decorations, especially the crib remain until this day when our attention is drawn back to Christmas, to the birth of Christ, and to his family. Even

as our lives have moved on, and the world is not paying attention, this day in the church allows us one last glimpse of the joy of Christmas and to look forward with hope.

We hear this story today, forty days after Christmas, when the joy of that season has long since left us, cooled by short dark grey days, by the relentless cycle of news that wears us down and grinds our hope into despair. Challenged by these things going on in the world, can we appreciate the power of the story that Luke has given us, a story of long waits, expectation and hope amid disappointment? Can we see ourselves in the aged Simeon and Anna, whose faith did not falter through years of struggle and disappointment?

When Mary and Joseph presented Christ in the temple; they presented him to Simeon and Anna. Yet, as Simeon's and Anna's confessions make clear for them Jesus, this child, was their salvation. He was acknowledged and confessed as the Son of God.

The collect for today day reminds us that Jesus Christ is not just those things for us too but that He also presents us to God, and in a real sense that is what was happening here today; as Jesus presented His parents to God, with Simeon and Anna, today we acknowledge He does that for you and me too.

In our Holy Communion, we make Christ present at the altar, to remember and recall His life, death, and resurrection. But the fact of the matter is that in a deeper sense, Christ is presenting us. We approach His table hand in hand with Him, carried by Him to His Father, the Creator of all things, and He takes us home with assurance.

So today, may we, like Simeon and Anna, proclaim our hope and faith in Christ, may we see Him here, on the altar, in our lives and in the world around us. May we sing with Simeon of the hope that brings, the hope that triumphs over death itself:

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.

Thanks be to God, Amen.