

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)
Also called The Purification of the Virgin
Or The Naming of Jesus
Or The Presentation of the Lord

Celebrated on 2nd February



Malachi 3.1-5 Psalm 24.[1-6]7-10 Hebrews 2.14-18
Luke 2.22-40

What's it all about?

Candlemas is the last of the Feast of the Church which refers back to the Christmas season. It comes 40 days after Christmas to reflect the fact that Jewish children were brought to the Temple 40 days after their birth to be dedicated to God. This event in Jesus' life is related in the Bible and this is what is celebrated in the choice of the passages below. The Feast is called Candlemas because candles were traditionally blessed during this service by the sprinkling of holy water.

First reading Malachi 3.1-5

The Coming Messenger

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

What's going on?

This passage comes from the last book of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and speaks of how God's messenger will come before God comes in judgement on the people. The purpose of God's messenger is to 'purify' the priesthood and to turn people's minds back to God. God's judgement will be upon those who have broken the Commandments and those who have acted badly towards those most in need of help, because God's intention is that the oppressed should be given aid and liberated from their situation. So this passage provides a context for understanding Jesus

as the messenger of God and his message to all people to repent and turn back to God.

Psalm 24

Entrance into the Temple

Of David. A Psalm.

**The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.**

**Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.
They will receive blessing from the LORD,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.**

Selah

**Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.**

**Who is the King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.**

**Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.**

**Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory.**

Selah

What's going on?

This psalm is used because it is thought to be a special song to be performed at the entrance to the Temple accompanying a procession of the ark in Hebrew tradition. The song is about God as creator, reminding the people that the world belongs to God and he is worthy of praise. The second part describes who is worthy to go into the Temple, - people who have moral worth who are searching to know God. The third section is an address to the doors of the Temple itself.

This psalm connects us directly with Hebrew tradition about the Temple, its holiness and the injunction to be holy in searching for God there. So Jesus too was brought to the Temple, but as both human baby and God himself, the King of Glory.

Hebrews 2.14-18

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

What's going on?

Hebrews picks up the thought evident from meditating on the psalm about the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Jesus was God, but as a human being he had to be brought to the Temple as it was the custom and religious requirement of his time and place. So he had to do as other Jewish children did and what we celebrate today is one of those ancient religious customs which made Jesus who he was. Yet he is connected to the idea of God's holy priesthood in Malachi, so that he can also be seen as the ultimate high

priest of God's Jewish people, whose vocation is to sacrifice himself for those in whose service he lives and works.

Luke 2.22-40

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

What's going on?

This is the record of the actual event in the gospel of Luke. Mary and Joseph went from their home to the Temple in Jerusalem to dedicate Jesus to God and to bring an offering. The importance of this event is underlined by two prophetic announcements from two older people a man and a woman. Simeon praises God recognising in Jesus the person who has been sent by God to bring salvation to the people. His words are a prayer which forms the 'Nunc Dimittis' in Christian worship. The fact that he makes this prophecy makes the point to the reader that Jesus is the end point of prophetic hopes and vision about God's plan. So Simeon, having seen and touched Jesus can say that his life is over because he has 'seen salvation'. Simeon tells Mary that the unfolding of Jesus' life will bring both joy and sorrow and that, as his mother, she will suffer too. Anna, the other prophetic figure gives praise and thanks to God and tells the news about the child Jesus to others. The story concludes with Jesus, Mary and Joseph going home to Nazareth. Luke concludes this section by reminding us that Jesus had a childhood, in which he had to learn, grow and respond to God. By the time he is a man he is physically strong, mentally and psychologically prepared and confident in God, ready to begin his ministry.