

CANDLEMAS 2017

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

SERMON - SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER JOHN ALTBERG

LUKE 2.22



MARY AND JOSEPH CARRIED THE NEWBORN INTO THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM. AN OLD MAN NAMED SIMEON CAME UP TO THEM...HE ASKED TO HOLD THEIR CHILD. WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES, HE HELD THE BABY ALOFT, THANKING GOD. *"I HAVE NOW SEEN YOUR SALVATION!"* HE EXCLAIMED. Anna, one of the temple ancients, heard Simeon and joined them. She, too, prayed aloud in thanks, and then began waving bystanders over to see the child. Mary and Joseph exchanged glances...wondered again at this child.

Asking God for salvation were prayers by both Simeon and Anna each morning. That long ago day in the temple, in the intimate circle around Anna and Joseph, Simeon also turned to Mary and said quietly, *"This child will be the cause of the fall and rise of many in Israel."*

Simeon's recognition definitively connects today's observance of Candlemas 2017, with Simeon meeting Jesus 2000 years ago and with Psalm 13, penned by David 1500 years prior...the underpinning theme is consistently about LIGHT...not ecclesiastical flashlights...but rather THE LIGHT THAT OVERCOMES DARKNESS to protect us from 'dark' tendencies and behaviors...

HYPAPANTE...the title for today in the Eastern Church, meaning in Greek, THE MEETING, recounts Simeon recognizing the Messiah in the midst of what Mary and Joseph might otherwise have regarded as just another very normal event...presenting the young child at the Temple.

The course of the event changed abruptly...Simeon somehow recognized this was the child of whom the Prophet had spoken...

YOU DID WHAT YOU SAID YOU WOULD DO GOD...NOW I CAN DIE IN PEACE...PRAYED ELDERLY SIMEON AS HE CARRIED THE CHILD JESUS...HE RECOGNIZED THIS BABY WAS HIS KING...THE ONE FOR WHOM HE WAITED HIS ENTIRE LIFE...A LIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE GENTILES AND THE GLORY OF ISRAEL...

The GRADUAL we sang minutes ago tells the story in yet another way...

"THE OLD MAN HELD THE YOUNG CHILD IN HIS ARMS; YET WAS THE YOUNG CHILD THE OLD MAN'S KING".

Indeed a powerful teaching moment in the Church Year immediately follows Epiphany...the season of appearances. Today is about Mary, about Simeon, about Jesus...about the light St John defines. LIGHT to which we inescapably return. Why...?.LIGHT is about LIFE. The church is about LIFE. During Advent we focused the impending illumination of the darkness, at Christmas the LIGHT appeared, we emphasize it in the Last Gospel and today...LIGHT is the topic, the popular name, CANDLEMAS...

Therefore we held lighted candles during the Gospel, just as Catholic Christians have done on this day since about the 8th century. Take the candle home – light it again...meditate about who is symbolized by the LIGHT...this is THE reason churches have candles!

While its origins are based in Scriptural chronology, some superstitions developed about Candlemas, including the belief that if one does not take down Christmas decorations by Candlemas, traces of the holly and berries will bring about the death of the person involved. In past times, Candlemas was seen as the conclusion of the Christmas season.

Farmers believed that the remainder of winter would be the opposite of whatever the weather was like on Candlemas Day. An old Scottish song..

*If Candlemas be fair and bright,
Come winter, have another flight;
If Candlemas bring clouds and rain,
Go winter, and come not again.*

Yes, this led to the folklore of "Groundhog's Day,"

Just as an anecdote - where I was on Thursday, 2 February was bright and sunny. On Friday I wrote this homily – it snowed all day. Perhaps there is more to Groundhogs and Scottish wisdom than we thought!

Today's special liturgy forms around events recounted in today's Gospel...meeting the salvation – LIFE - God promised and delivered in the person of Jesus.

Who is the person YOU met today while holding the candle...what is our own experience meeting Jesus, the light who has come into OUR world...place yourself in Simeon's role...who did you see...who are you going to tell?

LIGHT – LIFE – overcomes darkness...now and forever...

