

# A Candlemas liturgy

Jesus Presented in the Temple, Luke 2:22-40

The 40th day of Christmas, February 2

All read scriptures (in italics) and paragraphs marked “ALL.”  
Alternate readers for other paragraphs, including headers (in bold).

## Introduction to Candlemas<sup>1</sup>

“This feast [of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple] came to be called by the shorter and more beautiful name of Candlemas because the day it celebrates, recorded in Luke 2:22-40, is the day the old man Simeon took the baby in his arms and recognised him as ‘A Light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.’ It became the custom of the church to light a central candle and bring it to the altar to represent the Christ-light, and also on the occasion of this feast to bless all the ‘lights’ or candles in the church, praying that all who saw that outward and visible light would remember also and be blessed by the inner light of Christ ‘who lightens everyone who comes into the world.’”

“It had always been prophesied that God would one day come into the Temple that human beings had built for him, though Solomon, who built the first temple had said ‘even the Heavens are too small to hold you much less this temple I have built’. Candlemas is the day we realise that eternity can come into time and touch us in the form of a tiny child, that God appears at last in His Temple, not as a transcendent overlord, but as a vulnerable pilgrim, coming in His Love to walk the road of life along side us.”

## Lighting of the Candles

[Prepare five candles (may use an Advent wreath). Each in turn lights a candle, while another or all read:]

The Lord is the strength of my life,  
The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’

In Him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity.  
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world,  
A light which no darkness can quench.

ALL (center candle): Come, Lord Jesus, light of the world!

Tonight we celebrate with a feast of candles the one who is the Light from whom the light shone in the darkness at the beginning of creation, who was born as “a light to enlighten the Gentiles,” and who even now brings light which no darkness shall ever overcome.

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Guite, Introduction to “A Sonnet for Candlemas,” <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2023/01/28/a-sonnet-for-candlemas-12/>.

## **Collect for Candlemas** (*Book of Common Prayer*)

ALL: Almighty Father, whose Son Jesus Christ was presented in the Temple and acclaimed the light of the nations: grant that in Him we may be presented to you and in the world we may reflect His glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. Amen.

## **Purification on the 40th Day**

At his baptism, Jesus said to John the Baptist that “all righteousness must be fulfilled.” Just as he submitted to circumcision and baptism, according to the Law of Moses, so he submitted to the purification ritual of the 40th day.

*When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses...<sup>2</sup>*

Mary does not need to be purified from the birth of Jesus, any more than Jesus needed to be baptized for repentance of sins. Rather, the birth of Jesus ushers in the purification of the world. Born of a woman, born under the law, Jesus took upon himself the humanity of us all, by grace converting our fallen humanity back to God.

## **Consecration of the First Born**

*Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”<sup>3</sup>)...*

According to the law of Moses, a first-born child belongs to God. In theory, then, parents might present the child for service in the Temple. Yet in practice, it was customary for parents to present to the priests an offering of five shekels and take their child home. Mary and Joseph brought no shekels. Recognizing that Jesus is the Son of God, they publicly handed him over to God his Father.

## **Presentation to the Lord**

*and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”<sup>4</sup>*

Jesus proclaimed “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”<sup>5</sup> Mary and Joseph presented the offering of the poor.

## **The Song of Simeon**

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.*

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<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 12:1-4.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 13: 2, 12-15.

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 12:8.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:3.

*Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
which You have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,<sup>6</sup>  
and the glory of Your people Israel.”<sup>7</sup>*

Waiting in the Spirit, Simeon lived with hope for the Messiah, the consolation of Israel, to come. Profoundly oriented toward God in the depths of his being, he longed for the One who was to come, for the Suffering Servant foretold by the prophet Isaiah, for the One who reveals the glory of Israel for the salvation of all the world.

*The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel,<sup>8</sup> and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

Mary’s Son would become the rock that causes some to fall, who prefer the darkness to the light. For Mary, mother of the Lord, the glory of Israel is found in the lowly way of her son, the Suffering Servant. In compassion, Mary willingly assumed the suffering of others as her own, knowing that, in the darkness of the way of the Cross, the Light of the World shall triumph over sin and death for everyone.

“In the writings of the Church Fathers, a lack of feeling—insensitivity toward the suffering of others—is considered typical of paganism. In contrast to this attitude, the Christian faith holds up the God who suffers with men, and thereby draws us into his ‘com-*passion.*’ The *Mater Dolorosa*, the mother whose heart is pierced by a sword, is an iconic image of this fundamental attitude of Christian faith.”<sup>9</sup>

## **The Song of Anna**

*There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 42:6, 49:6.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 46:13.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 8:14.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* (New York: Image, 2012), p. 87. This liturgy is adapted from Benedict’s exposition of the Presentation passage, pp. 80-88.

Anna, a prophet filled with the Spirit, proclaimed, in the temple and throughout the town, the coming of the glory of the Lord. May we, like Simeon and Anna, look forward to the redemption of the world, and hear the good news of the Light of the World.

### **The Return Home**

*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death... For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:14–18)*

Like us in every way except without sin, Jesus grew in the grace of God.

*When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on Him.*

### **A Sonnet for Candlemas<sup>10</sup>**

They came, as called, according to the Law.  
Though they were poor and had to keep things simple,  
They moved in grace, in quietness, in awe,  
For God was coming with them to His temple.

Amidst the outer court's commercial bustle  
They'd waited hours, enduring shouts and shoves,  
Buyers and sellers, sensing one more hustle,  
Had made a killing on the two young doves.

They come at last with us to Candlemas  
And keep the day the prophecies came true  
We glimpse with them, amidst our busyness,  
The peace that Simeon and Anna knew.

For Candlemas still keeps His kindled light,  
Against the dark our Saviour's face is bright.

As we put away our Christmas lights for another year,  
may their message of hope, peace, joy, and love  
remain kindled in our hearts and reflected in our lives  
through our Lord Jesus Christ who has come to all, the light of the world.

ALL: Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Guite, "A Sonnet for Candlemas," available from his blog and published, with other sonnets for the Christian year, in *Sounding the Seasons*, by Canterbury Press.