

Candlemas Celebration at Saint Mary Magdalen

A Brief History of Candlemas Day

Among the many holy feasts on the Christian calendar, the Feast of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple (*or as it was formerly known, the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary*) is one of the oldest. It has been celebrated throughout Christendom since the 4th century. The feast day occurs annually on February 2nd which is exactly 40 days from the celebration of the birth of Jesus on December 25th. The presentation of Jesus took place in strict observance of Jewish law which at the time declared women to be unclean after childbirth and were thus required to remain homebound for a specified number of days. In the case of a woman who gave birth to a male child the mother went to the temple with her child 40 days after his birth. Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph took Jesus to the Temple as prescribed by law and as described in the Gospel of Luke: *"When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,' and to offer the sacrifice of 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,' in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord."*

The word "Candlemas" is derived from the imagery found in the prayer of Saint Simeon which is recounted in the Gospel of Luke: *"Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: 'Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.'" Those words "... a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel ..."* gave rise to the custom of blessing candles on February 2nd and thus it also became known as "Candlemas Day."

Candlemas is intended to be a solemn and worshipful time, a celebration that reminds faithful Christians that we not only honor Jesus Christ the Light of the World but that we are also required to try to be "a light in the world."

The Feast of the Presentation officially concludes the Christmas Season and in many parts of the world – especially in Rome and the Vatican – the Christmas Creche remains in place until after the February 2nd celebrations.

Crepes on Candlemas

In the 5th Century, Pope Galesius I who was Pope from 492-496 A.D., began the custom of giving out dessert crepes on Candlemas Day. Pope Galesius distributed them to people who were on pilgrimage to Rome and the Vatican and also to beggars and to the poor.

Crepes properly prepared and folded somewhat resemble a "swaddled baby", that is, a baby wrapped snugly in a blanket. Thus, the crepe is a reminder of the sweet baby Jesus and of the sweetness of Christ. Psalm 119 says: *"How sweet are Your words to my taste, O Lord! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"*

Interestingly, the crepe custom had evolved into a major event in the country of France where Candlemas is known as *"Fête de la Lumière et le Jour de Crepes"* (The Festival of Lights and The Day of the Crepes).

SMM Candlemas Celebration

Although the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple occurs on Tuesday, February 2, 2021, we will observe the Candlemas Day custom at all of our parish Masses on the weekend of February 6/7. The church will be adorned with many lighted candles along with displays of the candles that we will use and/or burn in church and on our altar throughout the coming year. We will also bless candles for our parishioners to take and use in their homes. After the reception of communion, as we exit church, every household will receive a large beeswax candle and everyone in attendance will receive a dessert crepe.

Our parish has not widely observed Candlemas in the past, so hopefully this will become an annual parish tradition.