

St. John's Church School Candlemas

Candlemas – this Sunday's observance

Forty days after his birth, his parents presented Jesus in the Temple, and redeemed by them with sacrifice, in accordance with the Law of Moses, and his mother was purified after childbirth, also in accordance with the Law. (Thus from Jesus' birth we see his life was one of obedient Sonship, offering sacrifice for redemption and purification.)

When Jesus was thus presented, he was recognized by aged Simeon and Anna – two representatives of the hope of Israel – as the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation, the Lord's Christ. Simeon takes him in his arms, blesses and praises God, in the canticle which we know as *Nunc Dimittis*, and acclaims him as a "light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel". (In him we see the Church's vocation to recognize Christ by faith, and to praise him in worship.)

Anna speaks of him to all that were hoping for salvation in Jerusalem. (In her we see the Church's vocation to bear witness to him whom we know in faith.)

Forty days after Christmas, on February 2nd (Groundhog Day – but more on that connection below) this occasion is commemorated in the Church as the Feast of **the Presentation of Christ in the Temple**, or the **Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary**. But it is more commonly known as **Candlemas**, because – in commemoration of Simeon's words – on this day by a tradition established in Jerusalem in the 4th century, candles are blessed, distributed, and carried in procession. In this ceremony we make the response of Simeon and Anna our own: like Simeon we receive in faith the light of Christ and bless and praise God for it; like Anna we carry this light to others. This Sunday after Candlemas we shall resume the feast, and observe the ancient ceremonies at 10:30 a.m.

What about Groundhog Day? In past centuries, it was thought that the weather on certain holy days was a good indicator of the weather that was to follow. That custom has almost everywhere been abandoned, except on Candlemas – though few who observe Groundhog Day remember that its significance comes from Christ's being presented in the temple!