



PRESENTATION OF THE LORD [CANDLEMAS DAY]

FEBRUARY 2

Forty days after His birth, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple for the rites of purification and dedication as prescribed by the Torah. According to the Book of Leviticus, when a woman bore a male child, she was considered “unclean” for seven days. On the eighth day, the boy was circumcised. The mother continued to stay at home for 33 days for her blood to be purified. After the 40 days, the mother and the father came to the temple for the rite of purification, which included the offering of a sacrifice — a lamb for a holocaust and a pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering, or for a poor couple who could not afford a lamb, two pigeons or two turtledoves. So the Presentation is a proclamation of Christ — Messiah and Priest, Lord and Savior. He is the light who came into this world to dispel sin and darkness. For this reason, traditionally, candles have been blessed at Mass this day that will be used throughout the year and especially tomorrow the feast of St. Blaise, hence the term “Candlemas.”

Interesting tidbits highlight this day: First, in many Eastern European countries, the feast of the Presentation officially closes the celebration of Christmas. For this reason, Blessed John Paul II began the custom of keeping the Nativity scene in St. Peter’s square until Feb. 2.

Second, Candlemas Day also was important in the lives of farmers. An old English song went as follows: “If Candlemas be fair and bright, / Come, winter, have another flight. / if Candlemas brings clouds and rain, / Go, winter, and come not again.” So if the bright sun “overshadows” the brightness of Candlemas Day, there will be more winter. However, if the light of Candlemas Day radiates through the gloom and darkness of the day, the end of winter is near. In America, Protestants decided we should replace Catholic Candlemas Day with Groundhog Day.