

The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple – a liturgy for worship at home

You may like to light a candle or candles for the duration of the service or have it/them ready to light for the ceremony at the end of the service.

Introduction

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear friends, forty days ago we celebrated the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now we recall the day on which he was presented in the Temple, when he was offered to the Father and shown to his people. As a sign of his coming among us, his mother was purified, as we now come to him for cleansing. In their old age Simeon and Anna recognised him as their Lord, as we today sing of his glory. In this Eucharist, we celebrate both the joy of his coming and his searching judgement, looking back to the day of his birth and forward to the coming days of his passion.

Act of Penitence

We have sometimes preferred to follow other 'lights' than Christ, the true Light. So let us ask the Lord to forgive us.

Lord Jesus, let your light guide us on the road to the Father:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, shine on us the light of truth and wisdom of the Spirit:
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, let the light of your mercy and compassion gather all nations together in your love:
Lord, have mercy.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us all our sins. May we walk in the light of Christ on the road to everlasting life. Amen.

Act of Praise

The **Gloria** as follows *or some other hymn of praise*

*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Let us pray that we may know and share the light of Christ.

Almighty and ever-living God, clothed in majesty, whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple, in substance of our flesh: grant that we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts, by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Today's readings

A reading from the prophet Malachi

(3: 1 – 5)

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 24: 7 – 10

Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, you everlasting doors;
and the king of glory shall come in.

Who is the king of glory?

The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord who is mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, you everlasting doors;
and the king of glory shall come in.

Who is this king of glory?

The Lord of hosts; he is the king of glory.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews

(4: 11 – 16)

Since the children share flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Acclamation to greet the Gospel:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Jesus is the light to lighten the nations,
and the glory of God's people Israel.

Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke (2: 22 – 40)

Glory to you, O Lord.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

At this time of the year, when the light associated with Christmas had begun to dim, the Christian people of old held a celebration, a festival of candles, in which they committed themselves to retaining that light in their lives throughout the year.

The symbolism was particularly appropriate in mediaeval northern Europe. By this time everyone was very tired of the long cold nights and short bleak days of winter, (as I am sure some of you were in choosing to live in this beautiful island of endless warm sunshine). Candlemas cheered people up. It was a joyful farewell to Christmas in an age when Christmas actually began, as it was always supposed to, on Christmas Day itself, rather than end then as it does for the market and the media, and in so many people's thinking and observance of the festivities today. Christmas celebrations of old lasted for nearly six weeks, or 40 days to be exact, but no more, as the prevailing superstition dictated that if hadn't removed all your seasonal decorations by 2nd February, Candlemas, you might be visited by wicked goblins who would make sure you had a miserable time for the rest of the year!

Candlemas was also a looking forward. It brought to mind the promise of the longer days and summer sunshine. But we know that such themes of light and darkness, which have been so much a part of our worship over Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, are entirely to do with spiritual realities no matter how the weather and the season may be treating us.

The feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple is very rich in meaning, and it helps us to understand so much of what our Christian life is about. As the child Jesus was presented and dedicated to God in the Temple, his disciples, the Christians, are also people who are dedicated to God through Baptism. Of course, our dedication no longer involves the offering of animals for sacrifices which people once thought were necessary to bring them closer to God. For us, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross ended all need for ritual sacrifices, and should have put an end to any notion of separation or distance between God and ourselves.

What we are called to do is to associate ourselves with that supreme sacrifice which tells us of the immense love of God for the world, for us. We enter into that sacrifice in a spiritual and practical way. We offer ourselves again and again to God throughout our lives, and, as a people, a Christian community, we do so especially when we come together as now for the Lord's Supper, the act

of thanksgiving for all that God has done for us especially through Jesus. For each time we do this we don't simply remember what Jesus did on that first Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, as if we could somehow forget. What we do is celebrate and enter into the saving events of his birth, life, death and resurrection, with the intention that we shall be transformed by them, nourished and renewed to offer more of ourselves to God as we continue our daily lives.

And although we do this week by week (in normal times), this feast of Candlemas focuses our self-offering in a special way. The candles we will light at the end of our service today are to remind us that what we celebrated at Christmas we should have brought and be continuing to take with us into this new year. Christ the light has come into the world, and as Christians we are called to reflect his light in our own lives. Appropriately, this feast comes between Christmas and Lent, the season where in spirit we follow Jesus to his cross, and consider the challenge, the cost, that following him means for each one of us.

We read that as Simeon rejoiced to see the Christ, he warned his mother, Mary that his mission would involve suffering and death for him, and that would mean a sword in the soul, that is, sorrow and heartbreak for her. The Christian life involves both joy and sacrifice. Today, both realities are set before us as we look briefly back to Christmas, the birth of the Saviour, and look ahead to his passion, his suffering. Candlemas links the crib with the cross. The message of both Christmas and Easter is highlighted and brought together.

The coming of Jesus is aptly described in the Gospels as the coming of light. He was God's light shining in the world, shining in the darkness of people's lives. He came that others, his followers might share that light. And he taught that what God gives us must not be hidden away so that no one can see it. As Jesus taught, a lighted lamp belongs not under a bed but on a lampstand, so God's light must shine in our lives so that everyone is able to see it. Even if they choose to look away they are given the opportunity, the choice, to see God's presence and love actually at work in the world in lives that are dedicated to him.

Ideally today in church, we would all have individual candles, and at the end of the service we would each light our neighbour's candle from our own. The practice is a reminder of how the light of Christ is transmitted in the world. We pass it on from one to another. This is the best mission strategy the Church

has. Most people come to Christ as a result of the influence and support of other Christians. Most new people come to church or continue to do so because Church members have invited, welcomed and encouraged them. Or not, as the case may sadly be. The negative impact of our lives on others is something we may not always be aware of but calls us to careful self-examination. Is it Christ's light that I transmit to others? Or is it my own darkness?

As we recall the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple, let us re-present ourselves in this his temple today, and so be renewed in his light and life. Let us offer ourselves anew to the service of God. And let us pray that the light of Christ that we receive today may shine ever more brightly in our lives every day. May his life and love increase in us more and more, so that we can continue with confidence the vital task of presenting him to the world.

A few moments of silent reflection are recommended

The Profession of Faith, *either the following or one of the traditional creeds:*

We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us come now before God our Father bringing our prayers and petitions for the world, the Church and ourselves.

Lord God, as Jesus was brought into the temple, may we and all your Church around the world know and love him. Bless our churches with an awareness of his presence.

May our Bishops Robert and David, John our priest and all who minister in your name grow ever closer to him, the perfecter of our faith. We ask your blessing on all who are being baptised or confirmed at this time, and all lives dedicated to God. We pray for all young people that they may grow strong in faith and love for you.

Lord, hear usLord, Graciously hear us

As Jesus was proclaimed by Simeon, as the light to the nations, we remember those nations that live in the darkness of war and violence and those who suffer through the dark and evil deeds of others. We pray for your mercy on all who are oppressed, the homeless, the refugees and those who suffer due to being unjustly imprisoned.

We ask your blessing on all relief and human rights organisations.

We pray for all government leaders and heads of State that they will lead with integrity and with the needs of the people at heart. We pray for wisdom as they seek to eliminate the Coronavirus.

Lord, hear usLord, Graciously hear us

As Jesus was proclaimed as the redeemer by Anna who waited patiently for your coming, we pray for those who have never been aware, known or felt your love. We pray that the light of Jesus will shine in our homes and his presence will be felt amongst us. We lift to you those who are sick, worried or troubled and especially those who contemplate ending their lives. Surround them by your love and light, comfort them in their hour of need.

We give thanks for the Samaritans and other agencies giving hope to the distressed and ask your blessing on their work.

In a moment of silence we pray for those known to us who need our prayers remembering especially Margaret Rainton, Petrina Thompson and Carol Hart (*please include others you may wish to pray for*).

Lord, hear usLord, Graciously hear us

We rejoice, giving thanks for those who have lived in your light. We pray for all who are recently bereaved and those who still find the loss of their loved ones painful. Heal their broken hearts and fill them with hope and life anew.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Believing the promises of God, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

Our Father.....

You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

You may now like to light a candle or candles for the concluding Candlemas prayers and the responsory of commitment:

Lord God, the springing source of everlasting light, pour into the hearts of your faithful people the brilliance of your eternal splendour, that we, who by these kindling flames light up this temple to your glory, may have the darkness of our souls dispelled, and so be counted worthy to stand before you in that eternal city where you live and reign, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people.

A light to reveal you to the nations; and the glory of your people Israel.

A light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Father, here we bring to and end our celebration of the Saviour's birth.
Help us, in whom he has been born to live his life that has no end.

Here we have offered the Church's sacrifice of praise.
Help us, who have received the bread of life, to be thankful for your gift.

Here we have rejoiced with faithful Simeon and Anna.

Help us, who have found the Lord in his temple, to trust in your eternal promises.

Here we have greeted the light of the world.

Help us, who will now extinguish *these candles*, never to forsake the light of Christ.

Here we stand near the place of baptism.

Help us, who are marked with the cross, to share the Lord's death and resurrection.

Here we turn from Christ's birth to his passion.

Help us, for whom Lent is near, to enter deeply into the Easter mystery.

Here we bless one another in your name.

Help us, who now go in peace, to shine with your light in the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.