

CANDLEMAS 2012
SERMON – CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
MALACHI 3.1 ST. LUKE 2.22



Candlemas – the Feast of Lights – the Presentation of Christ in the Temple – the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin! All of the names we know this day by...and they all tell a story.

Just before the reading of the Gospel, blessed candles were distributed and lighted. We held those lighted candles through the reading of the Gospel and until the conclusion of the Nicene Creed, where we firmly stated our belief in the forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection of the dead, and Life everlasting.

Candlemas – the Feast of Lights – commemorates the Presentation of Christ in the Temple forty days after his birth. Jesus is the Light of the World and this was his first visit to the Temple. We also commemorate Mary's Purification and the first time since the birth of Jesus she could enter the Temple to worship.

Orthodox Christians call today *Hypapante...the Meeting*. Not an ordinary meeting...but a very special meeting...a meeting that had been expected...a meeting the Prophet Malachi foretold 500 years earlier...“I will send my messenger to prepare the way for me. Then the Lord you are looking for will suddenly come to his Temple”. It was a meeting Simeon and Anna had been waiting for with eager and prayerful anticipation.

Waiting! Did you ever stop to think how much time you spend waiting? Waiting in line at the store...at the bank...or to meet someone at the airport! Sometimes we would rather be doing something else...something more productive. But waiting can be its own reward!

Saint Luke tells us Simeon was a just and devout man who spent most of his time in the Temple waiting for Israel to be saved. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, who had assured him he would not die until he had seen the promised Messiah. He had waited and he had lived for this very moment to come to pass.

Anna, too, patiently waited for the meeting. She stayed in the Temple day and night, fasting and praying, and her faith in God never wavered. And in the end, their waiting was rewarded.

Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms...he held the Son of God close to his heart and rejoiced. He gave thanks to God and asked that he now be allowed to die in peace: He had seen the world's salvation. Simeon's prayer of thanks, his own prayer of commendation, is the *Nunc dimittis...Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace*. It is the second canticle at Evening Prayer and we will sing it today after Communion.

Anna was able after she too had seen Jesus, the world's salvation, to share the Good News with all who were looking for hope.

Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Temple to both offer him to God and to give thanks for his life. Simeon gave Jesus back to his mother with some startling words: sorrow like a sharp sword, would break her heart. She would have to wonder and to wait to learn what Simeon's word's meant.

The Prayer Book contains a service called the Churching of Women, or the Thanksgiving of Women after Child-birth. The service has its roots in the ancient observances we commemorate today. We will soon have the opportunity to witness this service as the prelude to a baptism. We will welcome a new member into the Church and the Paschal Candle will be lighted...a sign that the Light that is Christ will be there to guide him in this life and into the next.

Candlemas – the Feast of Lights – the Presentation of Christ in the Temple – the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin – Hypapante...what story do these names tell? They are Epiphanies...showings...of who Jesus is...God's Son...the salvation of the world...the light that reveals God's will to the Gentiles...and brings glory to his people, Israel.

For now we wait with the same patience Simeon and Anna showed...we wait for the day Jesus will return in a final Epiphany...a showing...the revelation of himself in heaven. We wait with the same hope and expectation Saint Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians gives us the strength to build each other up...we wait for the day when all the saints will be gathered up to meet the Lord in the air.

It will be well worth the wait!

