

Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



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Feast of the Presentation (Candlemas)

Somehow, in modern western culture the date, February 2, has become Ground Hog Day, when a rodent comes out of its hidey-hole somewhere in Pennsylvania to predict the weather. The date chosen for this phenomenon is perhaps unfortunate **since the Christian Church has for more than 1,600 years recognized this date as the Feast of the Presentation.** In the liturgical denominations (Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Orthodox) February 2 is also known as Candlemas.

The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord is based upon the account of the presentation of Jesus in the temple in Luke 2:22-40. According to Mosaic Law, forty days after giving birth, a woman needed to make a purification offering and present her male child to the Lord. A sacrifice had to be made, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. This was done by Mary and Joseph, and according to Luke's account, at that time an old man named Simeon was in the temple, and he was moved by the Holy Spirit to recognize the child as the Lord's Messiah. This was confirmed by the prophetess Anna who was also in the temple.

The Feast of the Presentation is one of the oldest feasts of the Christian Church, celebrated since the 4th century in Jerusalem. There are copies of sermons on the Feast by bishops and theologians from the early fourth century, and it is mentioned in the pilgrimage of Egeria (381-384) to Jerusalem where she confirmed that the celebrations took place in honor of the presentation of Jesus in the temple.

Christmas in the West has been celebrated on December 25 since the year AD 354 when it was fixed by Pope Liberius. **Forty days after December 25 is February 2**, and the date is viewed as the conclusion of the Christmas-Epiphany season. While it is customary for Christians in some countries to remove Christmas decorations on Twelfth Night (Epiphany Eve), those in other countries wait until this festival day. It has also been traditional for many centuries on this date for Christians (before electricity) to bring candles to their local church to be blessed, as are the candles that are to be used in the church itself. Candles serve as a symbol of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Thus, the term "Candlemas."

So, as Christians we can smile at the antics of a semi-hibernating groundhog, but we know that February 2 is much more important than that. As the candles are lighted by the altar, we remember that this is the anniversary of the **presentation of our Lord** in the temple some 2,000 years ago, and that he was recognized then, as we recognize him now, to be the Light of the World.