

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE
(COMMONLY CALLED THE PURIFICATION OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN
ALSO CALLED CANDLEMAS)

WE ARE in fact today, commemorating two Jewish ceremonies. One is the Presentation of the first born son - an ancient ceremony based on the text in the book of Exodus (13:2) every first born male, both of human beings and of cattle, was sacred to God. That law may have been a recognition of the gracious power of God in giving human life, or it might even have been a relic of the day when the first born child was literally sacrificed to the Gods. The second ceremony, the purification after childbirth' involved the ritual cleansing of the mother. When a woman had borne a child she was unclean for forty days if it was a boy, (only eight days for a girl). The mother was not allowed to enter the temple or share in any religious ceremony until after forty days; at which time she would bring to the temple a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon for a sin offering. If she could not afford a lamb she was allowed to bring a second pigeon (this was called the offering of the poor). It was the offering of the poor which Mary brought. This ceremony is the origin of the 'Churching of Women' in the book of common prayer.

It was in the context of these ceremonies that Simeon appeared in the Temple. Simeon was a righteous man. He was waiting for - or looking forward to - the comforting of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. God had promised to him through the Holy Spirit that life would not end for him before he had seen the Messiah. In the baby Jesus he recognised the Messiah and he rejoiced. Now he was ready to depart in peace, that is to meet his death. His words have become known as the Nunc Dimittis - one of the great and

precious hymns of the church which we sing at Evening Prayer.

Lord now 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.

It is this particular episode which has given rise to the tradition of candlemas - the blessing and distribution of candles as symbols of the light of Christ in the world;.

'my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people;
a light to reveal the glory of God'

Christ is the light of the world. St. John says in the prologue to the fourth Gospel :

'In the beginning was the word; the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning, through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him, and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark; a light that darkness could not overpower'.

Christ is the word's true light but those who put their faith and trust in him are also called the light of the world. In the sermon on the mount Jesus says to his followers, 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a meal tub; they put it on

the lampstand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way, your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven'.

Every single member of the church is a light in the world. Your light is your faith in God. You did not create that light. Your faith - your light was kindled by someone else's faith some one else's light. Faith is caught not taught. Faith comes to each of us for reasons we cannot always trace or identify. This is why we call faith a gift, something we did not make or earn ourselves. **JESUS IS THE SOURCE AND ORIGIN OF THAT FAITH. BUT WE WHO PROFESS AND CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIANS ARE, WHETHER WE REALISE IT OR NOT, LIGHTS IN OUR GENERATION.** People will judge the Church - will even judge Christianity by what they see in us. Like John the Baptist - we are not that light but we bear witness to that light. This is a grave responsibility indeed.

Come back to the sermon on the mount. Jesus said to his disciples, 'When a lamp is lit, it is not hidden under a meal tub. You are the light of the world.' You do not know what light you are giving to someone else by which that person is finding a way through the problems of life. There is no reason why you should know. But God knows. He knows why he has kindled the flame of faith in your heart. All you need worry about is to see that you do not hide the light of Christ or prevent it being seen. God will take care of the rest. Jesus said that there will be many who will look without seeing and listen without hearing (Matt. 13:13). Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven."

Let us pray that we will not ever be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ.
AMEN.

ADVENT 4

NOTICES

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

"WAR AROSE IN HEAVEN, MICHAEL AND HIS ANGELS FIGHTING AGAINST THE DRAGON; AND THE DRAGON AND HIS ANGELS FOUGHT , BUT THEY WERE DEFEATED AND THERE WAS NO LONGER ANY PLACE FOR THEM IN HEAVEN". Rev. 12:7

1 What sort of writing is this? Not a parable - not a miracle story - not history. It is a myth.