

# Rector's Column

*It is you who light my lamp;  
the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness.  
Psalm 18:28*

Dear Friends,

I hope that the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany bring a happy beginning to your New Year. More than a commemorative Christmas carol, the origin of season of twelve days of Christmas goes back to a series of religious feast days celebrated as part of the Roman Catholic religion in medieval and Tudor England. Starting on Christmas Day, there were 12 days of religious celebrations, feasting and entertainments that lasted all the way up to 5 January followed by the celebration of Epiphany on January 6.

The twelfth day of Christmas was known as Twelfth Night. It marked the night before the feast of the Epiphany, the coming of the wise men to visit the infant Christ in Bethlehem. Twelfth Night signaled the last evening before the final day of the Christmas season, and people celebrated it with great feasts, games and plays. At the Tudor court, there were masques (plays) and huge banquets. Included in the feast was a Twelfth Night cake. It was a huge fruitcake, tasting a bit like a giant brioche (French pastry), and was baked with a coin or dried bean hidden in the mixture on each half of the cake. Men and women took slices from opposite sides of the cake, and whoever found the bean or coin in their piece became the king or queen of the Twelfth Night feast. It was their job to host the evening's entertainment, of singing, dancing and games.

The next day, people celebrated the final feast of Christmas – the Epiphany. After church services, they ate roasted lamb, and Epiphany tart (a giant jam tart made in the shape of a star). While people left up their decorations until Candlemas on 2 February, the twelve days of Christmas and the three weeks of Epiphany were over for another year.

Candlemas, also known as the Feast of the Presentation, is a Christian feast day commemorating the presentation of Jesus at the Temple by Joseph and Mary. It is based upon the account of the presentation of Jesus in Luke 2:22–40. According to the Hebrew rules in Leviticus 12, a woman was to be purified by presenting a lamb as a burnt offering, and either a young pigeon or dove as sin offering 33 days after a boy's circumcision. The feast falls on 2 February, which is traditionally the 40th day of and the conclusion of the Christmas–Epiphany season. This mirrors the 40 days of the season of Lent that then follows.

The Feast of the Presentation or Purification is one of the oldest feasts of the church. The pilgrim Egeria recorded how it was celebrated in Jerusalem in the 380's AD. In her travel journal, Egeria wrote:



*(Continued on next page)*

But certainly the Feast of the Purification is celebrated here with the greatest honour. On this day there is a procession to the Anastasis; all go in procession, and all things are done in order with great joy, just as at Easter. All the priests preach, and also the bishop, always treating of that passage of the Gospel where, on the fortieth day, Joseph and Mary brought the Lord into the Temple, and Simeon and Anna the prophetess, the daughter of Famuhel, saw Him, and of the words which they said when they saw the Lord, and of the offerings which the parents presented. And when all things have been celebrated in order as is customary, the sacrament is administered, and so the people are dismissed.

Now, I know some people may have taken down their Christmas decorations immediately after Christmas Day, but that is more along the lines of a secular celebration. Rather, the Episcopal tradition follows the influence of Tudor England maintained by Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth I who oversaw the development of a uniquely Anglican faith that combined aspects of both Catholicism and Calvinism into a “Middle Way” of belief and expression. In this New Year, I want to provide opportunities for Trinity to reconnect with our heritage and traditions and to become evermore grounded in our identity as a faith tradition and as a church.

As part of connecting with the Anglican identity and Episcopal traditions, our Sunday services on February 2 – the Feast of the Presentation or Candlemas – will include the blessing of candles, a custom that celebrates the light of Jesus Christ. The blessing is often accompanied by a prayer that asks God to sanctify the candles with the light of his grace and to enlighten the hearts of those who use them. On Candlemas, it is customary to bless church candles that will be used during the liturgical year, as well as candles for the congregation to take home.

On February 2, anyone or any household that would like to have candles blessed for use in the home to gift to others throughout the year, are encouraged to bring (new/unused) candles for blessing at our 8:00am or 10:00am services. For those unable to attend services in person, candles for blessing can be dropped off at the church office during normal business hours before the weekend of February 2. Just be certain to leave your name and contact information with any candles you may deliver so that we can be sure to get them back to you after the 2nd.

St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) offers a beautiful and insightful reflection on lighting the candles blessed during Candlemas:

The candles which you light reveal to you the intelligible light. Just as the church, that house of great beauty, is full of light from many candles, so the house of your soul, which is more precious than that church, should be illumined and full of light in a noetic sense – that is to say, that within you all the spiritual virtues should burn with divine fire... The multitude of burning lamps signify the illumined thoughts which should shine within you like lamps, so that there should be no dark thought in the house of your soul, but that all should be aflame and shining with the light of the Holy spirit.

*(Continued on next page)*

St. Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking about the mystery of the Feast of the Presentation, invites us to consider three aspects of the blessed candles. He says, “The wax of the candles signifies the unblemished flesh of the Divine Infant, the wick figures His soul, and the flame His divinity.”

Marking the halfway point between the Winter Solstice (December 21) and Spring Solstice (March 21), Candlemas/The Feast of the Presentation celebrates the returning light of spring. So, bring your candles and your children to services on February 2, when both the candles and all children will receive special blessings that day as we strive to walk in the light of God as a community of faith.

In Christ's Peace,  
Pastor Rachel+

The Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton, Rector