

The Blessing of Candles

The popular name for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is Candlemas. The association of this feast with candles comes from the song of Simeon when he calls Jesus 'a light to lighten the Gentiles'. It is because of this that it has become traditional to begin Mass with the blessing of candles for use in church during the year. In some churches, an altar is covered in candles which remain unlit and are blessed for future use. During Mass on this feast we often carry lighted candles in procession to remind us of the Lord, the light of the world, coming into His Temple. It is also very appropriate on this feast to have candles blessed for use in the home, particularly candles that might burn before holy images or during family meals. It is a beautiful way to hallow the life of your home and draw your family together. May the light of Christ, which no darkness can eclipse, shine in our homes and lives, this day and always.

Saints & Heroes

Saint Blaise

Blaise was Bishop of Sebaste in Asia Minor, and is said to have been martyred about the year 300. Because he was tortured by having his body torn with the iron combs then used by woolcombers, he became the patron saint of this trade. Since the woollen trade flourished in England for hundreds of years, the name of Bishop Blaise often occurs, usually as an inn-sign in towns that have at one time been centres of the woollen trade, such as Cirencester and Exeter. He became associated with guilds of woolcombers in Norwich, Yorkshire and elsewhere, and his day was celebrated by them up to fairly modern times. We are told that until 1825 a Bishop Blaise festival and procession were held annually in Bradford, when a child recited the Bishop's story in verses that began: 'Hail to the day whose kind auspicious rays deigned first to smile on famous Bishop Blaise.' It is also told of him that on his way to prison he cured by a word a boy who had in his throat a fish-bone that could not be pulled out. He is therefore often invoked by people with throat troubles and some churches offer a throat-blessing ceremony on his feast day, 3rd February.

Prayers to Remember

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Collect for Aid Against All Perils, Book of Common Prayer 1662.

31st January 2021 The Fourth Sunday
of Epiphany
4th Week
of the Year

Out of Darkness



Simeon took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Mark 1.16-18

The season following Epiphany draws to a close with the feast of the Presentation of the Lord on 2nd February, recalling what happened to Jesus forty days after his birth. Mary and Joseph carry Jesus into the Temple in order for Mary to be purified and for a sacrifice to be made on their behalf. They meet Simeon and Anna, who, like the other characters in the accounts of Jesus' birth, instantly recognise what they are seeing and how Jesus fulfils not only their destiny but also that of the whole world. Simeon declares that Jesus is "a light for revelation. Light provides us with comfort, and the warm glow of candle light on a dark winter's night brings us joy and peace. But there's another sense in which light can be disturbing. It can show up those things we'd rather not see, as in the rather cruel Gilbert and Sullivan song about the woman who thought she was rather more glamorous than she really was "She might have passed for forty-three in the dusk with the light behind her". Jesus calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light, so that we might see things about ourselves with new clarity and, literally, be enlightened. His light shows up the truth about ourselves, the truth about God, and gives us real vision. Can you think of times in your life when you have received this kind of 'enlightenment'? What does it feel like to recall that we live in the light of Christ?