

A Reader writes

Although I am writing this in the Christmas Season I am aware that by the time this goes to print, and you are reading this article, Christmas and all its activities will seem a long way away as our thoughts turn towards the penitential season of Lent. However, before we actually reach Ash Wednesday we are allowed one more glance at the infant Jesus when we celebrate Candlemas on 2nd February or, to give it its proper name, the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord in the temple at Jerusalem.

Whenever I hear the word 'Candlemas' my first thoughts go back many years to when I used to dread this festival celebrated at St Mary's, and I have an idea that those of you who were here around 40 years ago and had young children in tow will understand why! For those of you who do not know to what I am referring, let me explain! It was a custom then at St Mary's to allow the children, and there were many of them, to parade around the church holding lighted candles. No health and safety those days, only parents with high blood pressure!! Usually this went off without any casualties, although there was one occasion when I remember a child's hair beginning to singe!

To mark this particular feast the ancient tradition calls for the blessing of candles to be used during the year and a procession "to meet the Lord", just as Simeon and Anna went to the temple and found the Christ Child there. As Simeon praised God he spoke about Jesus being a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of the people Israel.

Light is a powerful symbol because of the many positive associations it conveys. Light shows us the way; we need a torch to find the right way in the dark, or car headlights and street lights to illuminate the roads. Light helps us to find what we have lost; when you have mislaid or dropped something often it is only when you are able to shine a light on the place that it is found. Light also can reveal what is wrong; it shows up dirt and damage clearly; think of a doctor or dentist using a small bright light to look in your ear or at your teeth to see what needs treatment. Light is also important to us as a warning. Think of a lighthouse warning ships away from dangerous rocks, or the flashing lights on emergency vehicles or around road works. Light is also a symbol of celebration such as fireworks on special occasions and candles on birthday cakes.

So when we think of Jesus as being the light of the world we can associate Him with all these symbols. We learn that Jesus is the light who can guide us to the truth about God and the right path of life. We learn that His light will help us find those who are lost. We understand that His life is like the powerful light which shows up what is wrong and needs treatment, and His life is also a warning of dangers that surround our journey of faith. Perhaps this Candlemas we can each make time to hold a lighted candle and, as we meditate on the light that it gives, we can think of it as the light of the Gospel in our hands, a sign of God's holy Spirit of Love that enlightens us and empowers us to reach out to one another and allow ourselves to be transformed and to reflect the light and life of God beyond the boundaries of our parish or congregation, our church, our community, and even our country.

May God bless you all

Sheila