

St Luke's in the City

Celebrating at the Crossroads Candlemass: Feast of the Presentation of Christ

Dear Friends,

Today's feast has a rich and complex history. It has variously been known as Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Purification (of Mary), the 'Meeting' (*'Hypapante'* as it is known in the East), and the Feast of St Simeon. It has been regarded as a feast of Mary, a feast of Simeon, a feast of Jesus. It has also been largely overlooked in liturgical calendars until relatively recently, in spite of the fact that its observance can be traced back at least as far as Jerusalem in the 4th century. Our celebration of this ancient Feast focuses attention on its role as a hinge in the church year, a critical transition between our celebration of the Feast of Incarnation and Lent-Easter to which we now turn our attention. (Indeed, in 2008 our attention is directed towards Lent-Easter very swiftly!) The liturgy today ends with our joyful procession to the Font, taking the lights we first carried to the Crib at the Midnight Mass, completing the movement we began in the dark of that expectant night. Around the waters of our baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ we will extinguish those lights, making the undertaking "never to forsake the light of Christ". At the Font we will commit ourselves "to turn from Christ's birth to Christ's passion, to enter deeply into the Easter mystery." As we will sing in Elizabeth Cosnett's hymn: "The candles invite us to praise and to pray, when Christmas meets Easter on Candlemas Day".

As I have often said, liturgical action is not historical re-enactment, nor simply commemoration of something or someone. Nor is it the mere recitation of received words, the mechanical repetition of ancient actions. And it's certainly not a book-reading exercise! Christmas meets Easter. Cradle meets cross. Womb meets tomb. This is about us. Something is revealed to our eyes. A light shines in us. Something in us falls, something in us is called to rise. Our inner thoughts are exposed. A sword pierces our hearts. What begins with the flesh of Jesus the Nazorean is taken up in our flesh. The presentation in the Temple once upon a time of a Jewish boy-child becomes a presentation in the temple of our souls. A meeting between Simeon and the holy family becomes a meeting between the God of cradle and cross and us. As we come to the end of our celebration of the Saviour's birth, may we in whom Christ has been born live Christ's life that has no end.

With my love,
David