



St Luke's in the City

150 years - 2009

Celebrating at the Crossroads

CandleMass

1 February 2009

THE CANDLEMASS PROCESSION

Since Christmas Day we have been reflecting on the significance for us of the Feast of the Incarnation. Today, 40 days later (in fact, February 2 is the date of the feast), on this last Sunday of this Christmas-Epiphany season, we read in Luke's gospel of the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem. Today is another 'hinge point' in the Christian year. We take one last look back to the baby of wooden Crib, before turning our faces towards the man of wooden cross.

Today is also known as Candlemas, because in the 5th century it became associated with the lighting of candles and torchlight processions. In the Eastern church today is known as "The Encounter", the cosmic and definitive encounter symbolised by the meeting with Simeon and Anna in the Temple. Candlemas is a bittersweet feast. We are confronted by Malachi's question about the end time: "Who can endure the day of the Lord's coming?" The revelation seen by Anna and Simeon calls for rejoicing. Yet the prophetic words of Simeon, which speak of the falling and rising of many and the sword that will pierce, hints at where all this is leading. Candlemas sets our faces to cross and empty tomb. A pivotal turning point indeed!

The mission we have been recalled to during Epiphanytime is the mission of Christ - the path of crucifixion-resurrection. The light who is coming into the world is the man of wooden cross. We have celebrated Christmas only because of Easter. Today's candle ritual gives us an opportunity to renew and affirm this for ourselves, as those baptised into Christ's death and resurrection. Simeon holds in his hands the Light of the world - so we are called to kindle our own lamps from the Light.

When we extinguish candles inside this place of worship, it is as though the candles' light is transferred to our hearts, to be offered for the light of the world. As the 12th century Cistercian, Guerric of Igny, puts it: "Do not so much carry lamps as become lamps yourselves, shining within and without, for yourselves and your neighbours."

Fr David