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## CANDLEMAS, THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE



In bygone centuries, Christians said their last farewells to the Christmas season on Candlemas, 2<sup>nd</sup> February. This is exactly 40 days after Christmas Day itself.

In New Testament times 40 days old was an important age for a baby boy: it was when they made their first 'public appearance'. Mary, like all good Jewish mothers,

went to the Temple with Jesus, her first male child - to 'present Him to the Lord'. At the same time, she, as a new mother, was 'purified'. Thus, we have the Festival of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

So, where does the name Candlemas come in?

Jesus is described in the New Testament as the Light of the World, and early Christians developed the tradition of lighting many candles



in celebration of this day, and processing with them around the churches.

The Church also fell into the custom of blessing the year's supply of candles for the church on this day - hence the name, Candlemas.

The story of how Candlemas began can be found in the Holy Gospel of St. Luke 2:22-40. Simeon's great declaration of faith and recognition of who Jesus was is of course found in the Nunc Dimittis, which is embedded in the Office of Evening Prayer in the West. But in medieval times, the Nunc Dimittis was mostly used just on this day, during the distribution of candles before the Eucharist. Only gradually did it win a place in the daily prayer life of the Church.

