

Homily based on the readings from February 2, 2026 (Malachi 3.1-4; Hebrews 2.14-18; Luke 2.22-40)

All of us, I am sure, have noticed that our society is profoundly confused about the timeframe for Christmas. By Thanksgiving, if not by Halloween, most people are in full festive mode – setting up trees and ornaments and strands of lights. Likewise, there is a mad dash to take down all the decorations by December 26 – if not sooner. Not only do people miss the entirety of *Advent*, but most of the *Christmas* season as well. It is unfortunate, although not surprising, that the forces of commercialism and sentimentality are often more powerful than the rhythms of the liturgical calendar.

As you probably know, the Christmas season – for most purposes – concludes with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which this year took place on January 11. In a sense, though, Christmas actually ends *today* – which, in case you have not been keeping track, is exactly forty days after it began. Today, as we have already heard, is the Feast of the

Presentation of the Lord – which, at least in the English-speaking world, is traditionally known as *Candlemas*.

The Book of Leviticus, which contains many of the specific details of the Jewish law, requires that every mother of a male child offer a sacrifice at the Temple exactly forty days after the child's birth. That is exactly what we see in today's Gospel – forty days after the birth of Jesus, the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph brought their newborn son to the Temple in Jerusalem. What Mary and Joseph were doing was completely typical for a Jewish family at that point in history. What happened once they got to the Temple, though, was entirely unparalleled.

When the Holy Family arrived at the Temple, they were probably hoping to offer the required sacrifice quickly and quietly, without causing any commotion. Instead, they immediately became the center of attention. First of all, a man named Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and publicly proclaimed him to be “a light for revelation to the

Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” After that, an elderly prophetess named Anna – who basically lived in the Temple – came forward and started talking about Jesus to anyone who would listen. The point is that the other visitors to the Temple – who were seeking the opportunity to worship the Lord – were given the unexpected and unprecedented gift of beholding his newborn Son.

Today is called the Feast of the Presentation, because it recalls the moment when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple. The alternative name – *Candlemas* – refers to an ancient tradition that, on this day, a priest blesses a large collection of candles, which are then lit and carried in procession around the church. Although this practice is not as common as it used to be, it is still an important part of our Catholic heritage.

There is, of course, a deeper connection between *candles* and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Remember the words of Simeon: Christ will be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” This phrase echoes

the beginning of the Gospel of John: “in him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (1.4-5). A bit later in the same Gospel, Jesus himself proclaims that “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8.12). The candles represent Jesus, because Jesus is the true Light – the original Light. The worshippers carrying candles around the church are simply imitating Mary and Joseph, who first brought the Light of Jesus Christ into the Temple.

As Christians living in a secular age, each of us has a fundamental duty to share Christ’s light with the people we encounter. Remember what Jesus told his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew:

You are the light of the world. ... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (5.14, 16)

Even though we have not been entrusted with presenting the baby Jesus in the Temple, it *is* our responsibility to display his splendor to the rest of the world – through our witness as faithful Christians. As we depart this sacred space and return to our daily routines, we must *all* make sure to keep the light of Christ shining brightly in our lives – forty days after Christmas, a hundred days after Christmas, and every single day of the year.