

Readings: *Malachi 3: 1 – 4 OR Hebrews 2: 14 – 18; Ps. 23(24): 7 – 10; Luke 2: 22 – 40.*

Today's feast marks the end of the first major part of the Church's year, which began on Advent Sunday and included the celebrations of our Lord's Nativity and Epiphany. It is one of the events recorded in Luke's Gospel which have given shape to the Christian calendar. Like the Ascension and Pentecost, it has been given a date – in this case forty days after the birth of Jesus, *as laid down by the Law of Moses.*

Like many other liturgical celebrations, observance of the day, as a feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, seems to have begun in Jerusalem in the fourth century. It included a procession, which at some time came to include lighted candles. A sermon by St Sophronius of Jerusalem says *Let there be no one who does not share in this meeting. Let no one refuse to carry a light.* The Candlemass procession has been observed in the West since at least the beginning of the seventh century.

The feast presents us with many themes for reflection on the person of Jesus, and on our relationship to him.

It shows us the parents of Jesus being obedient to the Law of Moses, so emphasising his human nature. The collect says he was *presented in the Temple in substance of our flesh.* The reading from Hebrews says that he *shared the same flesh and blood* as all human beings, so that *he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion able to atone for human sins.*

It shows him as God, coming to claim the temple as his own. The reading from Malachi says, *The Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter his temple,* and it goes on to speak of his role as *a refiner and purifier,* making the worship of the people acceptable to the Lord.

In the Eastern Churches the name of the Feast is *The Meeting.* It shows our Lord making a place of meeting with the faithful in Israel, represented by Simeon and Anna. In his song, the Canticle *Nunc Dimittis,* Simeon speaks of salvation both for Israel and for the pagans – which includes us all, who *go in peace to meet the Lord.*

It shows Jesus as the True Light, who *enlightens everyone who comes into the world,* and sends us out to *shine before others so that they may...give glory to our Father in heaven.*