

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Candlemas

Background



The feast has many different names in the Roman Catholic Church. It has been called the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and, more familiarly, Candlemas. Each name highlights a different aspect of the feast that the Church celebrates.

The liturgical celebration is also called the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, corresponds to an ancient Jewish practice of presenting the first-born to God.

As a result, Mary and Joseph brought with them Jesus, as St. Luke narrates, “And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (Luke 2:22-23).

St. Luke narrates how, while at the Temple, the Holy Family encountered an old man named Simeon and what he said next constitutes the basis for why the feast is called Candlemas.

Now, Master, you may let your servant go
in peace, according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel. Luke 2:29-32

Simeon declared that Jesus would be a “light,” and the Church developed a custom of lighting and blessing candles on this day. Historically the priest would bless all the candles used during Mass for the entire year. The congregation also received candles and the words of Simeon were repeated in song. (Source: Aleteia)

BLESSING OF CANDLES

1. At an appropriate hour, a gathering takes place at a smaller church or other suitable place other than inside the church to which the procession will go. The faithful hold in their hands unlighted candles.
2. The Priest, wearing white vestments as for Mass, approaches with the ministers. Instead of the chasuble, the Priest may wear a cope, which he leaves aside after the procession is over.
3. While the candles are being lit, the following antiphon or another appropriate chant is sung.

**Behold our Lord will come with power,
to enlighten the eyes of his servants.**

4. When the chant is concluded, the Priest, facing the people, says: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Then the Priest greets the people in the usual way, and next he gives an introductory address, encouraging the faithful to celebrate the rite of this feast day actively and consciously. He may use these or similar words:

**Dear brethren (brothers and sisters),
forty days have passed since we celebrated the joyful feast
of the Nativity of the Lord.
Today is the blessed day
when Jesus was presented in the Temple by Mary and Joseph.
Outwardly he was fulfilling the Law,
but in reality he was coming to meet his believing people.
Prompted by the Holy Spirit,
Simeon and Anna came to the Temple.
Enlightened by the same Spirit,
they recognized the Lord
and confessed him with exultation.
So let us also, gathered together by the Holy Spirit,
proceed to the house of God to encounter Christ.
There we shall find him
and recognize him in the breaking of the bread,
until he comes again, revealed in glory.**

5. After the address the Priest blesses the candles, saying, with hands extended:

**Let us pray.
O God, source and origin of all light,**

who on this day showed to the just man Simeon
the Light for revelation to the Gentiles,
we humbly ask that,
in answer to your people's prayers,
you may be pleased to sanctify with your blessing these candles,
which we are eager to carry in praise of your name,
so that, treading the path of virtue,
we may reach that light which never fails.

Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Or:

**O God, true light, who create light eternal,
spreading it far and wide,
pour, we pray, into the hearts of the faithful
the brilliance of perpetual light,
so that all who are brightened in your holy temple
by the splendour of these candles
may happily reach the light of your glory.**

Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

He sprinkles the candles with holy water without saying anything, and puts incense into the thurible for the procession.

6. Then the Priest receives from the Deacon or a minister the lighted candle prepared for him and the procession begins, with the Deacon announcing (or, if there is no Deacon, the Priest himself):

Let us go in peace to meet the Lord.

7. All carry lighted candles. As the procession moves forward.

8. As the procession enters the church, the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass is sung. When the Priest has arrived at the altar, he venerates it and, if appropriate, incenses it. Then he goes to the chair, where he takes off the cope, if he used it in the procession, and puts on a chasuble. After the singing of the hymn Gloria in excelsis (Glory to God in the highest), he says the Collect as usual. The Mass continues in the usual manner.

SECOND FORM:

9. Whenever a procession cannot take place, the faithful gather in church, holding candles in their hands. The Priest, wearing white sacred vestments as for Mass, together with the ministers and a representative group of the faithful, goes to a suitable place, either in front of the church door or inside the church itself, where at least a large part of the faithful can conveniently participate in the rite.

10. When the Priest reaches the place appointed for the blessing of the candles, candles are lit while an appropriate chant is sung.

11. Then, after the greeting and address, the Priest blesses the candles, as above nos. 4-5; and then the procession to the altar takes place. For Mass, what is indicated in no. 8 above is observed.