

# *Candlemas*

The festival of Candlemas is a feast for February, a feast to remind us that the tide of darkness that runs in every year has turned, and a feast which reminds us that the coming of Christ is the irresistible dawn, bringing on an eternal day, where nothing will fade or decay, where no-one will tire or age, where nothing will impede the gracious rule of the God of truth.

It is set in the Jewish Temple, which for Christians represents two things:

first, the way in which God has chosen to enter this transient world, so that its realities are gilded with the first rays of the rising sun: and

secondly, how the things illuminated by this light, being transient themselves, must be transformed in the Paschal mystery, must die and rise again, before they share fully in the divine life: as Ephesians says, *sharing in the destiny of God's holy people, so as to inherit the light with them.*

Malachi has a veiled foreknowledge of this need for the Temple itself, and the priesthood, to pass through the fire, to be laid under judgement. He warns the people gathered in the Holy Place of Jerusalem, that one is coming who will test them by fire; as Jesus himself said *I have come to cast fire on the earth; and how I wish it were blazing already!*

All of this hidden future gathers to a greatness when Jesus is carried to the Temple by his mother and father. They have themselves forgotten all the messages of angels, they are simple people on an accustomed errand: of course the child must be redeemed, like all the children of Israel, so that the merits of the Passover, by which the firstborn of Israel were saved, can be applied to him.

But the occasion is more than a simple fulfilling of the ritual law. It is the dawn of the new age of redemption: it is the liturgical opening of the New Testament. The old man who greets Jesus in the Temple of Solomon and of Herod the Great is more than a simple old Jew: he speaks for Abraham and for Moses, as he sees the whole religion of the Old Testament brought to its fulfilment. In the canticle he sings, the old ways of the past are delivered into God's hand, to pass away in favour of the dawn, of the future, which will remove all veils, and put out all the lamps of vigil; for *the City that comes down from God out of heaven shall need no lamps: the Lord himself and the Lamb will be their light.*

The bearing of these lights in our Church are a sign that we too are ready to receive Christ, to be the light of the whole world; may he be our light too, and burn from our hearts all traces of our past allegiance to the dark, and the deeds of the dark, and make us children of the light, and of the day.