

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Presentation of Christ
in the Temple
February 2, 2018
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Candlemas arrives just when we need it. February 2nd is just about mid-winter in Boston. It is a time we appreciate light and warmth and movement. And Holy Church provides us with all of that in this wonderful incident of the Holy Family on a happy occasion. The observance we commemorate is when Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Jerusalem Temple to present Him to the Lord. In honor of that event and the response of the holy man Simeon, we have the blessing of candles and carry lights in procession into God's house. As a liturgical devotion Candlemas goes back as far as we have recorded descriptions of such things, into the 4th century. You can read about it in the journal kept by a Spanish nun and liturgical buff named *Etheria*.

Forty days ago we remembered a few shepherds being invited to greet the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. When these shepherds arrived at the stable they must have surprised Mary and Joseph. The Holy Family had not sent out birth announcements! And now at Candlemas when the Holy Family arrived unannounced at the Jerusalem Temple they were greeted by this old man Simeon and an old widow, Anna, who promptly burst into praise! God was again full of surprises. Here was the effusive greeting to these three country people arriving in the big city. It is as if the Lord quietly entered His world and allowed only a few people to see and understand what was happening. The supernatural glory of God Incarnate could not be completely confined. It broke through in a few places. You can blame the angel for spilling the beans to a few shepherds on the night shift. Forty days later the Holy Spirit flooded the hearts of these faithful old people in the Jerusalem Temple.

We know nothing else the Church considers authoritative about the subsequent lives of either the Christmas shepherds or the Candlemas saints. But we do know what effect these greetings had on the Holy Family. Scripture tells us Our Lady pondered these wonders in her heart. No doubt these events gave the Blessed Mother and St Joseph cheer, comfort, and courage when danger threatened the Holy Child. Joseph and Mary were soon obliged to take their Son and go off quickly into Egypt for a few years.

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Even with the inspiration and knowledge that we are called by God to some task, we may not be spared subsequent temptations to stir up our doubts, anxiety, loneliness, and sense of being forsaken. We sometimes lose heart. Having a calling to follow Jesus does not include exemptions from hunger or fatigue. Just ask the Holy Family! But we are sure the temptations and distress suffered by Mary and Joseph were placed in the constant and thankful recollection that God, *God without proxy*, was with them in a marvelous way too wonderful to fully understand.

When we trace the divine purpose running through the joys and sorrows of Blessed Mary there is grace for us too. That is what the Rosary offers us. As we make our pilgrimage, walking by faith not sight, we catch a glimpse of God's dealings with us as we ponder the faith which sustained the Holy Mother. Each Christian moves through years of discipleship. The forces of evil (and the snare of temptations within and without) assault us. The unknowing world looks at us and sees nothing but lives of humble and unimpressive scenes. And this is easy to ridicule. No doubt some onlookers in the Jerusalem Temple thought Simeon and Anna had finally gone over the top! But Almighty God looks on and loves hearts tied to His Son and His Gospel. And so in your story and mine there are scenes of hidden sustenance of the Light of Christ, a Light we have once again tonight carried into a darkened world.