

"My eyes have seen your salvation'

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel." Luke 2

This prayer is sung every evening, for the office of compline. It uses the words of an old man, Simeon, in the story of the presentation of Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem, in the Gospel of St Luke. You may like to read this text prayerfully : Luke 2,21-40.

The theme of light breaking through the darkness is a recurrent theme in the liturgical cycle of the Incarnation, from the first Sunday of Advent to the feast of the Presentation, on the 2nd of February, a feast known as Candlemas. The birth of Jesus is celebrated around the time of the winter solstice, at midnight, when the night is deepest. On 2 February, as the days begin to lengthen, the liturgy invites us to join a procession as we enter the church, each carrying a lit candle. Symbolically, we accompany Christ the Light into the Temple of Jerusalem, where he will be 'presented' by his parents. The light has come into the world, and it is for all peoples.

The Gospel tells us that Mary and Joseph, both mentioned, arrive at the temple carrying the 40-day-old child, probably coming directly from Bethlehem, for a rite concerning first-born sons, who belong to God in a special way. In thanksgiving, the poor families, like the family of Jesus, offer two doves.

Let's take a look at a scene often depicted by artists: a young family with two doves. The baby Jesus, the newly incarnate God, is completely dependent on his parents. The presence of the doves emphasis the sense of peace and joy. This scene can be compared to a baptism. The child is celebrated and all rejoice as he/she is officially joining the community of faith. Note that Jesus' parents fulfil everything that Jewish law prescribes for him: eight days after his birth, the circumcision when he was named according to what the archangel said to Mary, and forty days after his birth, they do what is required for his presentation.

The story continues. An old man meets them at the threshold of the temple. This is no coincidence: the text stresses that it was the Spirit who led him there that day. This man, Symeon, a pious Jew who was eagerly awaiting the Messiah, recognises him in this child and takes him in his arms. Jesus' parents are not afraid to entrust their baby to this stranger. Symeon turns to God in praise and thanksgiving.

Symeon, identifying the Messiah in this poor family, knows that it is not a political Messiah who will use force to reign. He blesses the parents, and addresses Mary:

"a sword will pierce your own soul too". Symeon perceives that the suffering of the Messiah spoken of by Isaiah, will be that of his mother. The stories of the Incarnation, woven with joy because God "is with us" are marked by the prospect of suffering, rejection and death, if only because, as the Fathers of the Church say in the Creed, he became man.

The story tells us about another person who met Jesus that day, witnessing the scene : Anna, an elderly widow. a holy woman. Anna is the first apostle of the good news: "She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."

After the ceremony, they return to Nazareth, where they live an 'ordinary' life, with these memories to ponder.

This Feast of Presentation marks the transition from the Old to the New Testament. Simeon and Anna, who belong to the Old, welcome the Messiah for the new era that is beginning. The world will never be the same again.

But what about the pancakes?

In many countries, Candlemas is pancake day! The shape and colour of the pancakes represent the sun, evoking the rising sun that comes to visit us, the dawn that breaks the night.

Since 1997, the second of February is also the feast of consecrated life.