

From the Fathers

A sermon by St Sophronius of Jerusalem (560-638)

Our lighted candles are a sign of the divine splendour of the one who comes to expel the dark shadows of evil and to make the whole universe radiant with the brilliance of his eternal light. Our candles also show how bright our souls should be when we go to meet Christ.

The Mother of God, the most pure Virgin, carried the true light in her arms and brought him to those who lay in darkness. We too should carry a light for all to see and reflect the radiance of the true light as we hasten to meet him. The light has come and has shone upon a world enveloped in shadows; the Dayspring from on high has visited us and given light to those who dwelt in darkness. This, then, is our feast, and we join in procession with lighted candles to reveal the light that has shone upon us and the glory that is yet to come to us through him. So let us hasten all together to meet our God. The true light has come, the light that enlightens every man who is born into this world. Let all of us, my brethren, be enlightened and made radiant by this light. Let all of us share in its splendour, and be so filled with it that no one remains in darkness. Let us shine as we go together to meet and to receive with the aged Simeon the light whose brilliance is eternal. Rejoicing with Simeon, let us sing a hymn of thanksgiving to God, the Father of the light, who sent the true light to dispel the darkness and to give us all a share in his eternal splendour.

Through Simeon's eyes we too have seen the salvation of God which he prepared for all the nations and revealed as the glory of the new Israel, which is ourselves. As Simeon was released from the bonds of this life when he had seen Christ, so we too were at once freed from our old state of sinfulness. By faith we too embraced Christ, the salvation of God the Father, as he came to us from Bethlehem. Gentiles before, we have now become the people of God. Our eyes have seen God incarnate, and because we have seen him present among us and have mentally received him into our arms, we are called the new Israel. Never shall we forget this presence; every year we keep a feast in his honour.

Presentation of the Lord in the Temple (Candlemas)



The King of Glory

St Cyril of Alexandria writes 'Christ is the glory of Israel for he came out of Israel according to the flesh, though he is God over all, and blessed for evermore.' At the Presentation of Christ in the Temple there is a definitive fulfilment of the prophecy of Malachi; the messenger of the Lord has suddenly enter into his temple to purify the sons of Levi. Who is this King of Glory? He is the incarnate Saviour, fully divine and fully human, compassionate and true. But the glory of this king is not to be understood by any measure of earthly expectation - wealth, power, influence or fame. The purification of God's people demands a final sacrifice, a sacrifice which will complete and perfect all the many sacrifices of the Jerusalem Temple in which aged Simeon ministers as priest. God comes to his temple not to demand the perfect sacrifice but to make it, to be it. Simeon and Anna recognize this, not only the light and glory of Israel in the infant presented by his Mother most pure and St Joseph, but also as a sign that shall be opposed. Simeon knows that the glory to be revealed in God's anointed One will lead to the Cross. When the Christ-child as a man ascends that Cross to suffer and die there, the veil of the Temple is torn in two; the Temple is made finally redundant for it is Christ who gives and Christ who is the right worship of the Father.