### LSW

children

FEAST of the PRESENTATION

This is one of the Great Feasts of the Church, being the presentation of Jesus at the Temple in accordance with Jewish purification laws. Jewish laws requires new-born baby boys to be presented to the Temple 40 days after they are born, which also marks the end of the 40 days of purification of the mother, who is considered to be unclean and to be quarantined in confinement during the period. As the first-born son, Jesus was also to be given over to God, and redeemed by his parents with the sacrifice of a pair of doves or pigeons (Lev 12:1-8) – the sacrifice of poor people as the rich sacrifice a lamb instead.

An ancient feast dating back to at least the 4th century, the Roman celebrations included a candlelight procession. It seems to have originated from a similar pagan torch procession for the expiation of sins. Another example of how the early Church christianised pagan practices as part of its evangelisation.

The feast was eventually called *Candlemas*, with the blessing of candles before the procession. Today, candles are still blessed at mass but processions are rarer.

In France, people traditionally cook crepes, with a coin in one hand – if you managed to catch the crepe in the pan when flipping it, your family will be prosperous. Some people leave their Christmas decorations up until this day as it is seen as the last day of the Epiphany cycle.

Being the mid-point of winter, there is much folklore regarding this day (Groundhog Day in US and also the day badgers come out to test the weather in UK). Christians light candles to symbolise the Light of Jesus. Sometimes, lit candles are left at windowsills – but beware of curtains!

It is also the fourth Joyful Mystery in the Rosary prayers.

Year A

**Presentation of Jesus**

**Images**

We are a gift for Jesus

**Points to note**

This is a feast that comes with interesting stories children can identify with (see end panel) but the reading itself is laden with theological points about adherence to Jewish laws.

I will focus on the broader theme that Jewish laws require parents to give over their first born to God, echoing Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac.

**Liturgy**

Acclamation before the Gospel

Alleluia, alleluia!

The light to enlighten the Gentiles

and give glory to Israel, your people.

Alleluia!

Gospel

*Introduce the feast to the children and explain the Jewish laws regarding purification after childbirth (details in end panel).*

The Lord be with you.

*All:*  And also with your spirit.

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St Matthew

*All:*  Glory to you O Lord

(Lk 2:22-40)

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, – observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: *Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord* – and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel’s comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

‘Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace,

just as you promised;

because my eyes have seen the salvation

which you have prepared for all the nations to see,

a light to enlighten the pagans

and the glory of your people Israel.’

As the child’s father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.’

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God’s favour was with him.

This is the Good News of the Lord

**Dialogue**

Today is the feast of Jesus being circumcised, the Jewish equivalent of baptism of a baby. What gift would you give to Baby Jesus on his baptism/circumcision? *Let the children talk about the various gifts they would bring to such a party. Discuss how they would package up or wrap the gift.*

What if you are the gift to Jesus instead? How would you be packaged? *Move the discussion slowly from wrapping up the person in wrapping paper to wrapping ourselves up in Christian virtues. What kind of person should we be if we want Jesus to accept us as a gift?*

*Explain that this feast is celebrated 40 days after the birth of Jesus and that we bless candles on this day. Jesus gave himself to us as a gift on Christmas Day. We treat his coming with candles 40 days later as the Light of the World, which is his gift to us.*

*Discuss what object we would choose to be if we were to be given to Jesus. Would it be something rich or luxurious? Would it be something useful or helpful? Would it be something symbolic – like a mirror to reflect the Light of the World to the world?*

*If you have time, you can explain about Candlemas and its practices – see end panel.*