



ECHO

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH OF OCCITANIE www.ourchurch.fr

CANDLEMAS - THE FRENCH PANCAKE DAY

Heidi Worswick

In our Morning Prayer Service this Sunday we will be celebrating Candlemas or the Feast of the Presentation of Christ which occurs on 2 February. This is when Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be presented at the Temple according to Jewish law and custom, 40 days after the birth and is seen as the end of Christmastide. Therefore in many traditions, as in France, Christmas decorations are removed at Candlemas rather than Epiphany. As will hear in Luke 2 on Sunday, Simeon and Anna recognise Jesus as the Christ Child and proclaim him in the Temple in Jerusalem.

This is one of the oldest Christian Feasts - celebrated since the 4th Century AD in Jerusalem. It is believed that it came into the Western Christian traditions in the 5th Century in Rome partly to replace some of the Roman and Pagan traditions associated with the end of winter, the beginning of spring and returning of light.

There are many traditions associated with this day and many Christian traditions bless the candles to be used during the year in a service on this day, thus Candlemas. These candles serve as a symbol of Christ the Light of the World.

In Germany, there was a custom where the remaining amount of cold weather was determined by whether a badger would leave its set on Candlemas. This tradition continues today, but you might know it as Groundhog Day, a US tradition brought from Germany that predicts how much of Winter is left based on a Groundhog seeing its shadow on February 2nd.

In France, Candlemas is known as 'La Chandeleur'. It is traditional on this day to make crêpes (pancakes) and the day is also called 'Fete de la Lumiere'.

One custom on Candlemas is to hold a coin in one hand and flip the pancake with your other hand. If you catch the pancake in the pan, that will bring good luck for the coming year.

This year as we toss our pancakes let us pray for the Light of Jesus Christ to enter our hearts and minds and remember that we are also called to be a shining light in our communities.



FAITHS COME TOGETHER IN WORSHIP

Last Saturday, Clive and Linda Billenness joined ministers from the French Catholic and Protestant Churches in an ecumenical service held in the Protestant Temple in the Ariege commune of Carla-Bayle as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Full hygiene precautions were taken during the service with both ministers and choristers wearing masks at all times.

The service also marked a sad moment of farewell for Pasteur Veronique Iseemann who is leaving the Protestant Parish after 3 years serving in this area. We wish Pasteur Veronique well for her future ministry.



AFTER FLEEING FROM EGYPT, THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WANDERED IN THE DESERT FOR 40 YEARS, BUT ON SOME DAYS, TO MOSES, IT FELT A LOT, LOT LONGER.....



Nunc Dimittis

A commentary by Rev Canon Michael Burgess, Rector of Outrighton and Warburton on Rembrandt's painting "The Presentation of Christ"

Waiting is a common human experience. Our lives are made up of waiting that leads to encounter, and the waiting requires patience and humility. Milton wrote in his blindness, 'They also serve who only stand and wait' as he wondered what he could do for God's kingdom now that his sight had gone.

Simeon in this month's painting of the 'Presentation of Christ' had been waiting. He belonged to a people who had been waiting for centuries. He was heir to the hopes and dreams of a nation waiting for a better world now that the holy city was in the hands of Roman invaders.

With his people he clung to the hope that God would come to bring freedom and a new life. God's chosen one, the Messiah, would bring this about. When it came, there was no fanfare, no warning, just an ordinary family from faraway Nazareth in the Temple, performing the religious duties for the firstborn son. But the waiting led to encounter, and the sight of the newborn child led to insight as Simeon recognised that light and salvation had at last come.

Rembrandt has captured all this in his painting, 'Simeon with the Christ Child in the Temple': the faith and patience, the hope and humility of an old man, a priest, who takes the babe into his arms and blesses God. It was the artist's last painting and left unfinished at his death in 1669. The figure of Mary by Simeon's side may have been painted by another artist at a later stage. It is the aged priest and the new-born babe that impress us

as we look: Simeon with his venerable beard and eyes half closed, and the tiny child cradled in his strong arms, looking up intently with his eyes open.

As Rembrandt painted this canvas, was he saying something about his own life? He had not been afraid to paint his portrait at various stages - at 21, at 35, at 53 - a total of 60 portraits covering the span of years.

In this final painting the years have moved on as we see Simeon, mouthing 'Nunc dimittis' with his eyes half closed. Is the waiting over and the journey coming to an end, so that his eyes will fully close? Or will he open them to see that with the babe in his arms, God has more in store: the promise of a future as they step out together on a new journey?

Church Mice

Karl Zorowski

