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## *Candlemas and Light*

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler**  
**Observing Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation – Year C**

Happy Cross Quarter Day to you!

Maybe we've heard of the Winter Solstice, when the days in the northern hemisphere are at their shortest, and the nights are the longest. Maybe we've heard of the Summer Solstice, when the days are at their longest. Maybe we've heard of the Spring and Fall Equinoxes, when our days and nights are the same lengths.

But this week brings us another calendar phenomenon, one of the four so-called "cross quarter" days. Many ancient civilizations and cultures also observed, not just the solstices and equinoxes, but the four midpoints between them, the cross quarter days. They are not always exact, and they go by different names, but their observance can assist us.

One of them you have certainly heard of: Halloween, which always seems to feature recognition of the dead. Horrors! Because the midpoint between the Fall equinox and the winter solstice is a recognition of things passing, the middle of the Fall.

Well, this week brings another such cross quarter day: the midpoint between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. This week is often recognized as the very depth of winter. Winter, after all, only began around December 21; it was still relatively warm then. This week recognizes the middle of winter, its depth.

Christians incorporate this physical phenomenon, whether we realize it or not, when we keep the Feast of the Presentation on February 2 (this past Wednesday), forty days after Christmas, when the child Jesus is presented in the Temple. Just as we celebrate Jesus being born on December 25, we celebrate his being presented in the temple forty days later, February 2.

Over time, that feast has incorporated candles, so that its other name is Candlemas. Whether we realize it is a cross-quarter day or not, Christians yearn for light on February 2; and we have lighted candles on that winter feast, for hundreds of years.

Our own American culture has another name for February 2, don't we? It is Groundhog Day! It's a different name, and rather a silly-looking event, but its features are the same as the cross-quarter features of other cultures. On Groundhog Day, we were wondering about light, and shadow, and how much longer winter will be! Something in our human condition will always long for, and lean for, for light. We yearn for its energy, especially when we miss it the most – in the bleak midwinter.

But The Feast of the Presentation, and Candlemas, existed long before Groundhog Day! There was a weather proverb recited about Candlemas long before there was a Groundhog Day. The proverb went like this:

*If Candlemas Day be fair and bright,  
Winter will have another fight.  
If Candlemas day brings clouds and rain,  
Winter won't come again.*

Does that sound familiar? The sense is the same. The traditions of Candlemas existed before the traditions of Groundhog Day!

As we observe Candlemas today, the Feast of the Presentation, we bless all candles everywhere. We have tried to set out all the candles in the Cathedral. Ushers and members of the altar guild are bringing into the cathedral the candles that we will use all during this coming year. And we have put many individual candles into our hands. They are now lighted, signs that we ourselves are the light of the world, in Christ!

We pray today for light. Let us pray:

*O God of Light and of Dark, we pray to you from the depth of winter. We have had some cold days and some dark days. We have had some certain days and some uncertain days. Our season has been all the more erratic as we have worried about health and pandemic.*

*In our season of worry, and in our season of distress, we have yearned for light: the light of medical assistance, and the light of good sense, and the light of good faith for the common good.*

*We think we can see, perhaps, the arrival of Spring, and maybe the arrival of release from disease. Maybe it is only six weeks away. May the new light come quickly.*

*O Lord, provide light for us. Give us direction and confidence. Give us good health and the light of strong and wise civilization.*

*In your name we pray, AMEN.*

And now: we sing a song! With our candles, we sing a song that rejoices in light, a song that brings light into the world. We don't need to wait for any groundhog! It will be our light that brings light into the world. It's the song, "This Little Light of Mine."

As we sing this song, we are blessing all the candles in this cathedral, and all the candles in our hearts, and we are blessing the world. Let us sing:

*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*All around the neighborhood, I'm gonna let it shine. ...*

*I won't let anyone blow it out, I'm gonna let it shine....*

*Hid it under a bushel, No! I'm gonna let it shine. ...*

*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

AMEN.

Let us bless the Lord!

Thanks be to God!