

Today are we celebrating the Presentation of Jesus or Candlemass? It's both, but why do we do all this stuff with candles on the day on which we celebrate the presentation of the baby Jesus in the Temple? The simple answer is they represent the light of Christ coming into the world—but that is the incarnation, celebrated on Christmas. They also represent our hope of salvation which we commemorate with the liturgy of light at the Easter Vigil. Why is Candlemass associated with the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple?

An image might be helpful—if you have watched the right movies. Do you remember the second Back to the Future movie? When Marty McFly, his future wife Jennifer, and Doc Brown travelled to the far distant future of 2015, Jennifer accidentally found herself in her future house. She saw what happened when the future Jennifer and the future Marty came home and entered the house. The sensors in the house recognized their presence and welcomed them home. The lights in the McFly home came on.

Where was God's "home" on earth? The Jerusalem temple. The first temple; the one built by Solomon. After King Solomon completed the first temple, the ark of the covenant was brought inside. Solomon offered sacrifice, the priests left the inner sanctuary and the glory cloud which represented the presence of God was seen entering the space where the ark was kept. Then, before the Babylonians destroyed King Solomon's Temple, one of the prophets, either in a vision or in person, saw the glory cloud leave the temple. The Book of 2nd Maccabees tells us that the prophet Jeremiah went into the inner sanctuary and removed the ark of the covenant and hid it across the Jordan in the mountain where Moses was buried. Jeremiah told the people who were following him that the ark would not be found again until God gathered his people together and showed them his mercy. Jerusalem and the first temple were destroyed by the Babylonians. After the Jews returned to Jerusalem after the exile, they built a second temple—the one Jesus was presented in. The original ark was still lost, hidden in Moses' mountain, meaning that God was not present in the second temple in the same way he was present in the first temple. The presence of God was absent from the second temple until today's feast when Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus into the Temple. Jesus is God incarnate, the one who was sent to gather together the scattered sheep of Israel and unite them to all the peoples of the world, and the one who showed God's mercy by sacrificing himself on the cross to save us.

At the Presentation, Jesus, God incarnate, entered into his rightful home. The lights came on, maybe not literally, but the lights definitely came on in the

minds of Simeon and Anna who recognized Jesus for who he was; Simeon himself referred to Jesus as the light for revelation to the gentiles. The candles of Candlemas symbolically and liturgically welcome God back into his home.

As the celebration of the feast of the Presentation of Jesus developed over time, it was completely natural for it to be associated with candles. We are remembering and honoring the entry of God into human history. We are welcoming God back into his house. We are reminded that he is always physically present in the Eucharist inside the tabernacle of every Catholic Church. God is also present within each one of us, most concretely after we have received his body and blood through the same Eucharist. The presentation and the blessing of candles should also remind each one of us that we are meant to be bearers of Jesus' light in the world.