

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, February 01, 2026

The Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ
(Candlemas)

The Blessing of Candles, Procession, and Solemn

Eucharist
11:00 am

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Canon Carl Turner

on

Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

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'Changed from glory into glory.'

The past two weeks, in my sermons, we have explored something of what it is to create a beloved community formed on the value of the kingdom and aligned to the life and ministry of Jesus. Last week, we thought about the warm places that people need not just to survive but also to know that they are loved and cared for. Those warm spaces, such as the meagre attempts we have at Neighbor to Neighbor to create one, connect us directly to the incarnation where, 2000 years ago, God needed and experienced a warm space that was the small space of Mary's womb. Our God, my friends, needed that safe warm space and has consecrated all safe and warm spaces ever since.

We heard about this in our Epistle reading today: *"Since God's children share flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise shared the same things"* and *"he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect."*

Preaching on Christmas Day in 1977, when there was so much fear and darkness in El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero said this:

Everything we experience Jesus experienced: weariness, sadness, discouragement, loneliness, happiness, enthusiasm, friendship. Everything the human heart feels has been felt by God in Christ. That is why Christ is the revelation of humanity to human beings. ^[1]

Just think about that for a moment: **Christ is the revelation of humanity to human beings.**

We are taught that what we celebrate at Christmas is the birth of Emmanuel – a name that means *God with us*; and that the incarnation is about *Jesus revealing God to us*; if you will, God coming down to our level and living among us. On Christmas Day we always read from the beginning of John's Gospel which culminates in the phrase *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* (John 1:14). What is lost in the English version is the real meaning of the Greek word translated as 'dwelt.' That word finds its origins in *pitching a tent*. It is almost as if the writer of the Fourth Gospel is saying that the Word became flesh and *pitched his tent among us*. The significance of such language would not have been lost on those whose ancestors lived in tents and, indeed, for 40 years in the wilderness, the Ark of the Covenant was also kept in its own tent or 'tabernacle.' The Hebrew tribes were well used to God's glory travelling with them and they pitched a tent so that the glory could be at the heart of their encampment.

By pitching his tent among us, God in Christ chose solidarity with those whom he had created. By pitching his tent among us, and being revealed as a child in the Temple, God reveals true *humanity* to us. That is, the true meaning of what it is to be made in God's image. Jesus is the only person who at one and the same time reveals the glory of God *and* the glory of being fully human; fully alive! This is at the heart of St. Irenaeus' famous phrase carved on the memorial to Archbishop Michael Ramsey at Canterbury Cathedral – "*the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God.*"^[2] Jesus reveals God to us and, in turn, reveals to God what it is to be truly made in his image; the incarnation allows us to participate in that relationship or, as Romeo said, "*Everything we experience Jesus experienced,*" which means that Jesus also experienced darkness and not just light and joy.

This Candlemas celebration, coming for us while the days are still short and when the nights are still long, is a sign of the Light of Christ bursting into the darkness of our lives. Simeon takes up the child Jesus and proclaims him as "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*" Jesus is the one in whom we see the glory of God made visible and the potential for humanity made in his likeness. Candlemas encourages us to deepen our relationship with God and with one another; to enter into the darkness, but not to be afraid. It is a feast that celebrates the hope of humanity; it allows us to be true to ourselves and open to God. As God pitched his tent among us, so we are invited to pitch our tents in his presence and to deepen our sense of community which, at the end of the day, is also a sign of how God wishes his creation to be experienced.

Last week, I reminded us of our mission here on 5th Avenue – to worship, love, and serve Our Lord Jesus Christ; and that by worshipping the Lord, we learn how to love God and love one another; and once we experience that kind of love, we are able to serve others with that same kind of love; that power in the Kingdom of God is exercised through love-filled service; through creating a warm space for all, including the vulnerable and the needy; though putting Jesus first and above our own needs and aspirations. When Mary and Joseph presented the child Jesus to the old priest Simeon, Simeon recognized the glory of Israel, but he also gave a chilling prophecy about how Jesus would be destined to be a sign that many would oppose and that their secret inner thought would be revealed which would be, particularly for Mary, like a sword piercing her own soul. That is why the Feast of Candlemas is a kind of liturgical pivot – dare I say it, a liturgical 'tent peg' that looks back to Christmas, but forward to the Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

When God entered our world and pitched his tent among us, he took a risk; he emptied himself into his creation to reveal his glory and to show human beings how to live glorious lives; so, he now asks us to take a risk. Today, in this mass, we will soon receive Holy Communion – to take within ourselves the very body and blood of Christ poured out for you and for me. St. Thomas Aquinas, whose feast day we kept last week, says this of receiving Holy Communion: "*O sacred banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.*"^[3] So, receiving Holy Communion, my friends, is also a risky business! Communion should not just change us to be more like Christ in his glory in heaven, but also to be fully alive, fully human, and that will demand a great deal of us as we attempt to look beyond ourselves and to our neighbors near and far; but this worship – this communion – will help us to love and serve our neighbors.

Preaching on the Feast of Candlemas, Rowan Williams said that discovery of the glory of God through our reception of Holy Communion not only is the taking of God's glory within ourselves but also a call to radical action from ourselves; for to consume the glory of God demands that we also seek God's glory in the darkness of the world around us. He said this:

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When we not only adore, but eat, when we take that life literally into our own lives, that's what we're committed to; being at the heart of God's world, at the heart of human need, having our eyes opened— illuminated, as this feast so powerfully reminds us—to see where need is, to see where humanity cries out for our company, our healing hand, our understanding. In that, God's glory is poured out. ^[4]

References

- 1 Oscar Romero – Sermon preached in San Salvador Cathedral, Christmas Eve 1979
 - 2 Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.7, trans. Robert M. Grant, 'Irenaeus of Lyons'
 - 3 St. Thomas Aquinas wrote this Magnificat antiphon for Vespers on the Feast of Corpus Christi, in 1264.
 - 4 Rowan Williams – Sermon preached at St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Oxford, Candlemas 2018
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