

Did you know . . .

Candlemas

Candlemas is a Christian holiday celebrated annually on Feb. 2, commemorating three occasions: presentation of Our Lord, Jesus' first entry into the temple; and the Virgin Mary's purification.

Candlemas is also known as "The Feast of the Presentation Christ in the Temple" in the east; and in the west, "Feast for the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary" and "Meeting of the Lord."

There are many beautiful traditions associated with Candlemas:

- In some parts of Europe, such as France, special crepes are eaten. Each member of the family prepares and cooks a crepe while holding a coin in hand. This is believed to assure wealth and happiness until the next Candlemas.
- In Spanish-speaking countries, whoever finds baby figures hidden inside the Kings' Cake (*Rosca de Reyes*) on Epiphany on January 6, must bring food to a gathering held on February 2.
- Many Orthodox Christians celebrate by bringing beeswax candles to be blessed for use at church or home.
- Some people leave Christmas decorations up through Candlemas.

Candlemas occurs between Winter Solstice and the March Equinox, so is considered the "half-way" point to spring.

It is unclear when Candlemas actually began being celebrated. Some sources indicate Christians began Candlemas in Jerusalem as early as the fourth century while the lighting of candles began in the fifth century. Other sources say that Candlemas was observed by blessing candles since the 11th century. An early writing dating back to around 380 AD mentioned that a feast of the Presentation occurred in a church in Jerusalem, observed on February 14. This feast was observed on February 2 in regions where Christ's birth was celebrated on December 25.

One of the beautiful symbols of Candlemas is the Snowdrops or Candlemas Bells which bloom early in the year, even before Candlemas. Some varieties bloom all winter (in the northern hemisphere). The superstitious used to believe that these flowers should not be brought into the house prior to Candlemas, but in more recent times it is thought these flowers actually purify a home.

According to folklore, an angel helped these Candlemas Bells to bloom and pointed them as a sign of hope to Eve, who wept in repentance and in despair over the cold and death that entered the world. Many Christians now see the flower as a symbol of Jesus Christ being this hope for the world.

Judy Pearson

