

**Sunday 1 February 2026,
the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)**

Collect:

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and glory of Israel:
make your home among us,
and present us pure and holy
to your heavenly Father,
your God, and our God. Amen.

Readings for this week:

Malachi 3:1-5; Psalm 24:1-10; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

Purification, testing, refining run through all of our readings today, elements that we also find in imagery around baptism. Just before the events described in our Gospel reading, Jesus had been circumcised, and therefore marked as bound to God and nation through faith. Now his place as firstborn is being acknowledged. The dedication of the eldest child to God links back to the saving of the Hebrew people at the time of the Exodus when the angel of the Lord killed the firstborn of the Egyptians but passed over the Hebrew families. This dedication, like circumcision, is a mark of the covenant that binds God to the chosen people, and a reminder of the duty of the people who are also bound to God.

Purification, according to Luke, is something that Jesus, Joseph and Mary (one ancient name for this day is 'The Purification of Mary') are all required to do. We are aware that, in a society with strict rules about blood and contamination, Mary would need some ritual purification before being allowed back into Temple or synagogue, a concept that carried over into the Book of Common Prayer rite 'The Churching of Women' which was still in use in the twentieth century. This idea of contamination might also have been perceived to affect Jesus also, but it is unclear why Joseph might need purification and Luke gives us no clues. This may simply be because he was not clear about Temple liturgy, however, the image he gives us is one of family solidarity – what affects one affects all.

Perhaps this chimes with the image in Malachi of the community requiring cleansing and refinement if it is to fulfil its duty of being a holy nation. Malachi explicitly links such ritual purity with the creation of a holy society, and defines this as one that treats everyone fairly, including hired workers, the destitute and strangers. In Psalm 24 we hear a similar message, while in the passage from Hebrews the focus returns to Jesus as the one who fulfils God's covenant promise, not just on God's side, but also as one of us.

With Simeon's words about Jesus, 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' ringing in our ears, Christmastide, the season when light is born in darkness, ends and we look towards Lent and Easter, the moment when the Christ the eternal light breaks through the darkness of the tomb.

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna,
who lived to welcome the Messiah:
may we, who have received these gifts beyond words,
prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes
to bring us to eternal life;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings for next week:

Genesis 1:1-2:3; Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26; Romans 8:18-25; Matthew 6:25-34
Second Sunday before Lent