

Today we celebrate the feast day of the Presentation of Christ at the Temple and it's of course a celebration of one of the very earliest episodes in Jesus' life.

But we might be more familiar with this feast day being called Candle-mas, where candles were traditionally blessed on this day in the church; a festival which then grew to mark the end of the Epiphany season.

But it has also as a feast day, been given other names as well such as the "Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary" or the feast of "the Meeting of the Lord".

But today I want us to reflect together upon an understanding of the feast day of Candle-mas and to do this I'm going to reflect upon three candles that are present and lit in our church this evening. Because through reflecting upon these candles we might even better understand Simeon's and Anna's first reaction when Mary carried Jesus into the temple on that first occasion.

And the candles which form part of this reflection this evening for candle-mas is first the candles at the altar, then the candle which is lit in our side chapel above the ambry and finally the paschal candle or Easter candle

which stands proudly at the back of church near to the font.

Now there is no getting away from the fact that we need light.

Light makes a huge difference in our lives. Light itself brings life - If the sun was to be turned off tomorrow, the plants on the earth would ultimately die and we would be plunged into darkness.

But also light brings with it warmth and energy. Light also it's said brings at times a sense of joy and peace, maybe when we see a beautiful sun set or sun rise. But also light can illuminate the darkest of places.

Now thinking about the candles which are lit in church tonight, firstly the altar candle, now the altar candles illuminate the place where we celebrate the remembrance of the last supper, the place where the presence of Jesus in the bread and the wine is shared together. These candles then stand on either side almost as if they are illuminating that scene, a scene that has been recreated for 2000 years. Showing to us the place where we gather together to share communion, the place where we encounter the presence of Christ through the sharing

in our communion together, in the sharing of his body and blood.

Now in the side chapel we have of course our aumbry, which is built into the wall of the church, it is an integral part of the very fabric of the church, and it is the place where we keep the reserved sacrament, which is consecrated bread and wine. So from our main altar the reserved sacrament is then taken to the side chapel and any that is remaining after communion is reserved to be used throughout the week for home communions and for services in our care homes. But above the aumbry is a candle which is lit, but it is only lit when there is reserved sacrament inside, when there is reserved sacrament present. If you've never noticed this candle I would encourage you to go and have a look, because it is a very important part of the church, because it is the place where through the lit candle we know that the consecrated bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ is present, so the candle lit above the ambry is often known as the candle of presence.

That is why for many the side chapel, as a holy space, can be a very good place to have some time of quiet prayer and reflection, with the candle lit acknowledging that

Christ is with us both individually and collectively. That Christ is present.

And finally we have the paschal candle or the Easter candle, as it is sometimes called, which stands proudly at the back of church near the font and of course this candle is new every Easter and as it is carried into church for the very first time either at the Easter vigil or on Easter Sunday morning itself, the person carrying it in sings or announces 'the light of Christ', so the candle itself represents the light of Christ coming into the world in and through his resurrection and in turn the light of Christ being present in the life of the church and all of its people. At baptism services we then take a light from the paschal candle to light a baptism candle for the person being baptized, symbolizing the light of Christ coming into their lives through being baptized. So the paschal candle could be thought of as symbolically representing the presence of the resurrected Christ upon the earth, in the church and in our lives.

These three candles, this trinity of candles; the candle of the altar, the candle of presence above the aumbry and the paschal candle, the candle of Easter, then all these three shed light upon the presence of Christ. The presence of Christ here in this holy place, Gods church,

just as Anna and Simeon acknowledged the light of Christ being brought into the temple that very first time by Mary and Joseph. So Simeon and Anna could almost be thought of as holy human candles, shedding light upon the presence of Christ.

Simeon and Anna's reaction then when they first encounter Jesus in the arms of his mother in our gospel reading this evening is in effect a reaction of them acknowledging the presence of Christ in not only that place but also their lives and through our candles in church at the altar, at the aumbry and at the font, we too acknowledge also the presence of Christ in a very visible and symbolic way.

We can then discern a lot about our Christian lives from Simeon and Anna's reaction on first encountering Jesus at his presentation in the temple, because we too are called as disciples to be symbolic candles which show the presence of Christ in our lives and in so doing we shed that light into the life of others.

Amen.