

What is Candlemas? How are we celebrating it?

*“My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation”*

The ancient church was adept both at piggy-backing on already established pagan festivals to create new Christian festivals, as well as lining their festivals up with the rhythms and seasons of the natural world. Which is why the “Christmas season” -- a season that is obviously well past in the secular world -- continues in the church until February 2nd. Candlemas is the Christian Festival of Lights, and this celebration marks the end of Christmas. Forty days after we tell of the birth of Jesus, we encounter the story of his presentation in the temple, and Simeon and Anna’s recognition that the light of God is revealed in this baby boy. It falls at the mid-point of winter and also became a practical celebration -- during the “candle” Mass, candles used in the church and in homes are blessed for the upcoming year. (Interestingly, the secular world has used the same maneuvers of the early church, claiming February 2nd away from its Christian connotations and marking it instead as Groundhog Day).

Although we no longer rely on candles to light our homes and churches, Candlemas nonetheless invites a simple and meaningful expression of faith in our modern world. This year, Anglican churches in St. Catharines are gathering on the evening of February 2nd in the centre of town, the Market Square, to ask for God’s blessing upon our light, allowing it to shine in the heart of our city for the year to come.

The format of the evening is simple. If you use candles in your home or your church, bring them with you this evening to share in a blessing. With that sign of light and blessing as a physical reminder, we can reflect together on what it means to be called into darkness, to be present ‘here in this place’ as bearing witness to, inhabiting, God’s light. We conclude our evening with fellowship and refreshment, wine, cheese and hot chocolate, as we enjoy a tangible sign of the joy that we receive in God’s life.

Place: Market Square, St. Catharines

Time: 7:00pm