

The Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple: Candlemas  
February 2, 2014  
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## Ritual Notes

*Ritual Notes* is the title of a book first published in 1894. It is “*A Comprehensive Guide to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Book of Common Prayer...interpreted in accordance with the latest revisions of the Western Use...*” I have a copy of the 10<sup>th</sup> (and I think last) edition published in 1956. I found this copy as a young Priest in 1982 about to begin my ministry as Rector of Christ Church in Portsmouth, NH. The book is filled with everything you need to know about liturgy and ceremonial, including how to cense the altar and how to keep the feast days of the calendar. The last time I consulted *Ritual Notes* was some years ago when a visiting bishop was not quite sure when to put on and take of his mitre!

Here at Grace Church, we have our own tradition of liturgy and ceremonial. Some might call us “High Church” or even “Anglo-Catholic,” but I think these distinctions have become very blurred over the years. I prefer to think that we take our worship very seriously and we celebrate the sacraments in a very traditional way trying to emphasize the “beauty of holiness.”

We even have a “guide” for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist here at Grace Church. Today I’ll be handing this guide out and discussing the Holy Eucharist in our Inquirers’ Class. It is helpful to know why we do what we do.

Today we celebrate St. Luke’s own version of Ritual Notes. Luke ends his birth narrative with describing three rituals “according to the law of Moses”; Jesus’ circumcision and naming on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after his birth; Jesus’ presentation in the Temple on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after his birth; and the purification of Mary, also 40 days after giving birth to Jesus. And so, each year on the Sunday closest to February 2, we celebrate these rituals, and this year, February 2 just happens to fall on a Sunday.

I think Luke wants to remind us of three important realities as we look at these ancient Jewish rituals. First, we see the faithfulness and devotion of Mary and Joseph. They wanted to do everything right, everything possible for their son. Jesus received his faith from Mary and Joseph. Luke also tells us that at the age of 12 Jesus came to the Temple in Jerusalem on pilgrimage with his family and his parents found their son teaching the elders.

How many of us were given the gift of faith by our parents? Perhaps we’ve changed denominations; maybe we’ve gone through our own times of doubting and searching, but where did it all begin for us? With our parents, in our families, during our own childhood? We take faith formation for our children very seriously. This is a large part of Mother Elizabeth’s work here (and she did spend last night with the youth group after making hoagies!). We want to do all we can to help our children grow in their knowledge and love of the Lord.

The second reality Luke points us to is the wisdom and faithfulness of the aged Simeon and Anna. They were “*righteous,*” “*devout,*” faithful in corporate worship and private prayer. They model for us examples of growing old in the faith – waiting and hoping and celebrating God in our midst. We have our own parishioners in their 70’s, 80’s, even 90’s who share with us their

wisdom and faithfulness. Anna and Simeon are inspirations for us as we age and continue to participate in the life of the Church.

Finally, these stories of the rituals Luke describes show us Luke's understanding of Jesus. Jesus is the one who saves. He brings salvation and glory. He will be a light for all. Hence this day's other title, Candlemas. He is a sign of God's redemption. Yet he will be opposed and cause division – "*the falling and rising of many.*" Jesus is strong. Jesus is wise. Jesus shows us the favor of God's grace. Alleluia. Amen.

Malachi:1-4  
Psalm 84:1-6  
Hebrews 2:14-18  
Luke 2:22-40