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## Candlemas: the feast of the One who is the Light

The Feast celebrated on February 2 dates back to Ancient Rome, when Lupercalia was observed precisely in February, the month of purification, in honour of Lupercus who protected the herds from wolves. Other traditions refer to the she-wolf that suckled the twins Romulus and Remus. Thus thrived its legends and feasts. *The people of Israel, on the other hand, had another biblical tradition that the Christians embraced and made their own: the mother, forty days after birth, presented her newborn child at the Temple, offering a sacrifice.* The account of the celebration of the Presentation of Our Lord Jesus in the Temple dates back to the second half of the fourth century, and is found in the famous 'Travel Diary' of Roman noblewoman Egeria, who ventured with great courage on a pilgrimage to the places where the Saviour had lived. At the *Anastasis*, the Basilica often referred to as the Holy Sepulchre, the Gospel of Luke was proclaimed: "*The fortieth day after the Epiphany is solemnly celebrated here*", says the pilgrim, comparing it with the great joy stemming from the Pascal mystery. Israel, the chosen people, understood that it was their duty to become a light for all peoples on the path of history and to pass on the light of the Torah - the supreme gift of the Almighty who penetrated Moses' consciousness and made Himself known - in order to enlighten all peoples with this message of salvation. Indeed, the prophet Simeon, deeply rooted in his Jewish tradition, proclaimed: *for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*

### **Feast of light, but above all the feast of the One who is the Light.**

The Oriental Byzantine tradition is rich in meaningful reflections sung during the liturgy of this day, known as *Ypapanti*, marking the *Encounter* between the People of Israel, with its centuries-long fidelity of tradition and expectation, and a small child recognised as the Messiah. Andrew of Crete embraced it and left it as a living testimony: *He who is borne on high by the cherubim and praised in hymns by the seraphim, is brought today according to the Law into the holy temple and rests in the arms of the Elder as on a throne. From Joseph He receives gifts fitting for God... Simeon, having now been granted the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning himself, blesses the Virgin Mary Mother of God, and foretells in figures the Passion of her Son... In the flickering lights and candles, worshippers were led to praise the great mystery that was being fulfilled in time with solemn invocations: Adorn thy bridal chamber, O Sion, and receive Christ the King: embrace Mary, who is the gate of heaven, who herself truly brings the glorious King of new light. She remains a virgin, though bearing in her hands a Son begotten before the daystar, whom Simeon, taking him in his arms, proclaimed to the people to be the Lord of life and death, and Saviour of the world.* Lit candles will be blessed in our churches to illuminate the celebrations and remind us that in recorded history darkness was pierced by a birth that took place in a small, unknown and unremarkable hamlet, but one that the prophets had predicted and awaited. The light of Israel pierced the centuries, and remains true to its proclamation of the Torah; for Christians, Jesus Christ is the incarnate Torah, Light from Light. Every age has experienced darkness, and today we are touching it with our own hands. But we will not succumb because we know that we can entrust ourselves to that shining light which protects us and leads us all to the Father.

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