

SERMON - Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, February 2, 2020

The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord was observed in Jerusalem in the fourth century. It was brought to Constantinople by the Emperor Justinian in 542, and has since been numbered among the feasts of the Lord. Today's feast has four different names, each one recalling a different aspect of the feast. First of all this feast is called the "Meeting of the Lord." This recalls the meeting of the Lord with righteous Simeon and the prophetess Anna. St. Simeon, according to tradition, was one of the seventy who translated the Holy Scripture from Hebrew into Greek in the third century before Christ. The righteous Simeon was awestruck when he came to the words in the seventh chapter of Isaiah that the Messiah would be born from a Virgin. The Holy Spirit revealed to St. Simeon that he would not die until he had seen these words of Holy Scripture fulfilled. This came to pass when the Most-Holy Theotokos, accompanied by her guardian the Elder Joseph, brought our Savior to the Temple on the fortieth day after His birth. Zachariah, the father of St. John the Baptist, was serving as High Priest in the Temple at the time, and had Mary placed among the virgins. After taking the Christ child up in his arms, the Righteous Elder Simeon uttered those famous words, "Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, etc." which are read or sung at every vespers service. Soon after uttering these words, he reposed, as did the prophetess Anna, who had also been waiting to see the Messiah in ripe old age.

The second name of this feast is "The Purification of the Mother of God." According to the Jewish law (Leviticus 12:2-4), a mother who gave birth to a son would return to the Temple after 40 days of giving birth and would bring her new-born son with her. A sacrifice of either turtle doves or pigeons would be offered. According to Exodus 13:15, every first-born son would be consecrated to the Lord. Although the Mother of God was in no aspect "unclean" or in need of prayers of "purification," she humbly obeyed the Law and waited the prescribed forty days before returning to the Temple with her first and only born son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The third name of this feast, "The Presentation of the Lord," refers to bringing the first born male child to the Temple as already mentioned.

The fourth and last name of this feast is a Western name, "Candlemas." This is in memory of the Roman custom of lighting candles on this feast, which recalls the lights in the Temple in Jerusalem. It is for this reason that in the Russian Orthodox service books it is prescribed that we bless candles on this day.

Forty days have passed after we have celebrated the Nativity of our Lord. What can we bring and what sacrifices can we offer to God and the Church? Can we volunteer to offer more of our time for church activities? Can we offer our service and help the Parish Council to fulfill the necessary responsibilities required to keep and maintain our church? Have we been saying our morning and evening prayers? Have we fasted every Wednesday and Friday? When was the last time that we went to Confession? Have we thanked God for all that we have received? What has changed in our life since the Birth of Christ forty days ago? What progress has been made? Whatever our answers to these questions on this, the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, one thing is certain. We must be spiritually prepared to meet Christ. May our Lord help us in this good struggle, by faith in God our Father, the mercy and love of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the grace and wisdom of the All-Holy Spirit, Amen.