

## Christ, our light and our peace

February is the month we celebrate Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, and the day priests bless candles for use in the liturgy. (Luke 2:22-40).



**BY BISHOP  
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*Bishop Michael  
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been bishop of  
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Oakland since  
May 2013.*

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DOMINIQUE  
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**W**e bless candles because when lit, they represent the light of Christ. That's one of the reasons we named our new cathedral "Christ the Light." When I was in high school choir, we used to chant at Mass on Feb. 2, "A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the Glory of your people Israel." These are the words Simeon said when he held the baby Jesus in his arms at the Presentation in the Temple.

Candlemas is the traditional conclusion of the Christmas mystery. And what is that mystery?

God the Father looked down from heaven, saw the plight of mankind gone astray since the time of Adam and Eve. He sent prophets to try and help us correct course, but when those prophets were rejected, the Father decided to send His only Son. At Christmas, the Eternal Son of the Father became a human being. "A man like us in all things but sin." (Heb. 4:15)

It's like this: When a Navy aircraft carrier deploys, it often goes around the world, and is away from home for nine months to a year (or more). The 5,000 sailors miss their wives and children. And the family members really miss their spouses, parents and children serving on board.

So when a carrier comes back home to the Navy base in San Diego, Bremerton or Norfolk, it's a huge deal. Fireboats meet the carrier and escort it, celebrating with plumes of water shooting into the air. Sailors are "manning the rails" in crisp dress blue uniforms. And the sailors' wives, children and parents are on the dock, carrying "Welcome Home" signs, straining to see their sailor. The first ones off the ship are not those of the highest rank, but those sailors whose wives gave birth to babies they have not yet seen.

The embraces of sailors and their loved ones, and the holding of those newborn babies, are some of the most tender moments I've witnessed.

Now you have some idea of the joy Simeon felt in the Temple when he held the newborn Savior. He had been waiting not nine months, but a lifetime. And the people of Israel had waited for centuries.

In the picture of the sailor embracing his wife after so long a wait, you have some idea of the love the heavenly Father has for each one of us, by sending his Son to be born of the blessed Virgin Mary, to save us from our sins.

Most world religions are the story of mankind seeking God. But not with Christianity and our mother Judaism. Christianity and Judaism are the story of God seeking man.

I know some people don't feel happy at Christmas. Maybe you lost your mother or your spouse last year — and you were alone at Christmas for the first time. Or maybe you've been diagnosed with cancer or other serious illness. Or maybe you lost your job.

The priest chaplain on the aircraft carrier I mentioned was watching all the wives and girlfriends leap into the arms of their sailors. The priest, being celibate, was thinking, "There's no one here to welcome me when I come home." Then he heard Christ say to him, "But you're not home yet."

To those of you reading this, I assure you: Christ is here for you. Jesus Christ has been born for you. Not as a "one-off." He wants to be born into the lives of each and every one of us. To guide us through this valley of tears into the realm of heavenly glory, where every tear will be wiped away. HE is our Peace.

As we conclude the Christmas season, let yourself be loved by the child Jesus, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, and splendor of the Father. Allow the Mighty God and Prince of Peace to find you. †

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