



**THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY
PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE
31 JANUARY 2021**

Candlemas
Luke 2:22-40

(Figure 0. – the pictures are below)

Perhaps you have noticed this year, along with the usual discussion of exactly when Twelfth Night is, an expressed desire by some to keep the Christmas lights up until Candlemas. (Figure 1.) This is part of a bid to cheer ourselves up during a dark plague month. (In the Stevens/Lemmon household we did not attempt to hold out any longer than the usual scramble to find the boxes to pack away the decorations on 6 January.)

The more public discussion this year does remind us, however, that the Christmas/Epiphany season extends to forty days from Christmas Day, when Mary's purification after childbirth fell due, according to the Old Testament rules, with the 'poor man's' offering of two pigeons. Mary and Joseph, Luke's gospel tells us, combined the purification with the presentation of their first-born child, Jesus, also in accordance with another Old Testament rule. (Figure 2.) Through the course of the Sundays in Epiphany each year we are shewn ways in which Jesus is made manifest to the world, and Candlemas (2 February, but transferred this year to today, the nearest Sunday) it is the turn of the Temple in Jerusalem – the place on earth where the Hebrews came closest to God – to receive the touch of Christ – a second hallowing of that sacred place. In normal times we would mark the feast with candles carried in procession, symbolising the coming of the True Light of Christ into the Temple, and so into all the world.

But this is only part of the story that Luke gives us; in it we have also the encounters with Simeon and Anna, two devout older people, both on the look-out for something great coming from God. (Figure 3.) We don't know exactly what they were expecting, perhaps they didn't either, but both knew, as soon as they saw Jesus, that they had found it – seeing in him all the promise of God.

Simeon makes plain that this promise is not 'easy' salvation, but costly, exposing all sorts of things that people would prefer to keep hidden, but it is salvation for all that – the only salvation worth having – something built on solid foundations – a cure for the world's wrongs.

As I get older I find the faithfulness of Simeon and Anna ever more attractive. What a blessing to have your life-long hopes confirmed and fulfilled towards the end of your life, when youthful vigour is waning (or has waned!).

One other thing that I have read before, but have only remarked this year – the Feast of Candlemas was observed in Jerusalem from 350 AD, but it did not spread through the church generally until 542 AD when the Emperor Justinian (Figure 4.) ordered its observance at Constantinople as a thanksgiving for the cessation of the plague. Perhaps there is some comfort for us to take from that?

Clive Lemmon

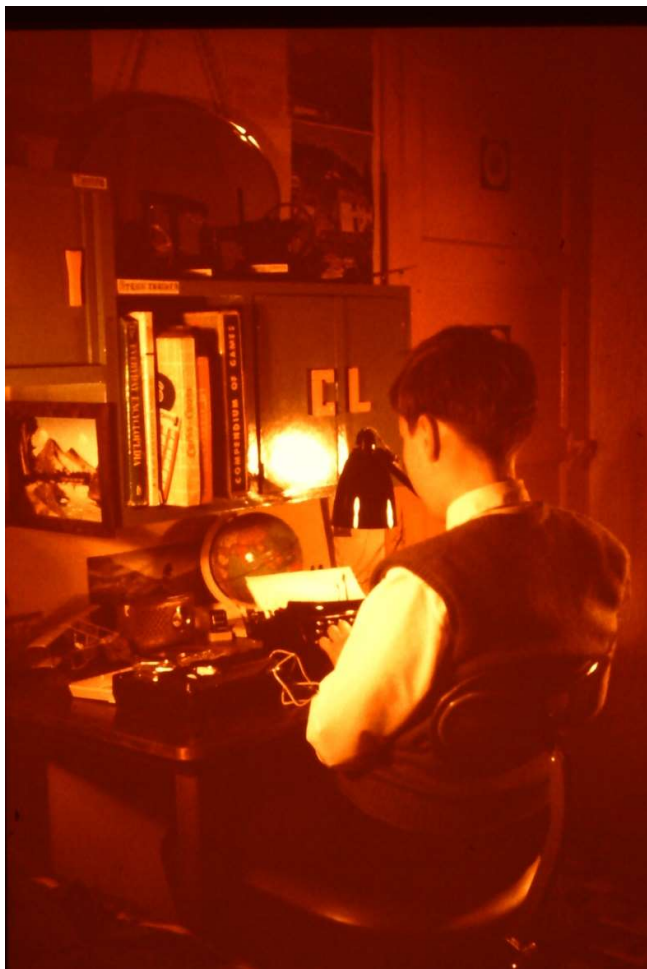


Fig 0: Clive at his desk in 1966



Fig 1: Christmas decorations in the Lemmon household in Sheffield in 1965 (with Ernest Lemmon)



Fig 2: Candlemas at S. Matthew's 2020



Fig 3: Simeon and Anna see Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the Temple



Fig 4: Emperor Justinian