

# The Feast that Keeps on Giving

---

**BY THE REVEREND CHARLES E. SINGLER, D.MIN.**

*Rector of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral  
Director of the Office of Worship, Diocese of Toledo*

© 2008

Many of our holiday observances during the liturgical year seem to conclude with an abruptness. We certainly see it in the yards of many homes on December 26 when the live Christmas tree that sat in the picturesque bay window adorned with colorful lights and bulbs is lying flat on the curb awaiting pick-up for disposal. Either the Feasts of Epiphany and Baptism of the Lord just don't have the luster of Jesus' birth, or people are simply victimized by Christmas consumerism.

From the Catholic Christian perspective, Christmas transcends the boundary of historical time. The mystery of faith celebrated during the Christmas feasts goes beyond the moments classified as manifestations. Two additional feasts related directly to Christmas that are often overlooked in their importance are the Feast of the Presentation (February 2) and the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25). Many liturgical theologians refer to these two observances as Incarnational feasts outside the cycle of Christmas.

The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord (previously known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary) occurs forty days after Christmas. This event in the life of Jesus rekindles the manifestation of God's Holy One in the midst of all humanity. From the earliest of times when this annual feast was commemorated in the Christian Church, it was often accompanied by a candlelight procession. The candles carried in the ritual procession are a reminder of the day that Simeon, a pious Jew who waited for the coming of the long awaited Messiah, spoke openly of Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk.2:32). Historians claim that by 1000 A.D. the candle procession associated with this liturgical feast also included a blessing of candles. The blessing of candles and carrying them in procession lead to the traditional name "Candlemas". In our present context of time, the celebration of Mass on this feast includes a ritual to bless candles used at home and in our churches.

As a Christmas feast, the Annunciation of our Lord's birth is set in the context of the trimesters of pregnancy. The immovable date of March 25 is nine months to the date chosen to commemorate the Lord's birth (Dec. 25). This feast honors our Lord's conception in Mary's womb, the moment when his earthly life began. So honored is this annual feast that it has been classified as a solemnity and is celebrated as such even should the annual date fall on a weekday within the season of Lent. An additional significance to the celebration of the Annunciation, as is also the case on the solemnity of Christmas, is the genuflection (not a bow) during the recitation of the words during the Profession of Faith: "*by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and*

*became man.*” So awesome is this divine exchange that the Church’s posture kneels out of respect for the mystery of the Incarnation.

As many of us will see that the visible reminders of Christmas are tucked away for another year after the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, there are still two others awaiting us.