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# **“Just as on Easter Sunday”: On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord**

by

**Martin F. Connell\***

## **I. Introduction**

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple,<sup>1</sup> known in some churches as “Candlemas,” no longer bears the gravity it had in some Christian communities and their calendars in late antiquity; yet questions remain about the feast’s origins and theology in the evolution of the liturgical year. Interest in the Presentation is drawn into this essay as a result of the work of Thomas Talley in his investigations about the emergence of the liturgical year.<sup>2</sup> After considering Talley’s theory about the origins of the year, this essay asks some questions and sheds some light on the development of this feast. It also proposes that in the evidence on the Lukan Presentation might be a palimpsest of a “Lazarus” narrative proclaimed during an initiation rite,<sup>3</sup> and it concludes with a suggestion about method in studying the origins of the liturgical year.

## **II. The State of the Question Concerning the Presentation**

Recent research on initiation in the early church has suggested that the *duration* of spans of preparation were standardized before the *times* of the initiation rites were set in the liturgical year. Maxwell Johnson, for example, has written that “it is quite possible that the three-week period reflected in the Lenten materials of later liturgical sources was a very early ‘free-floating’ baptismal preparation period without any *necessary* relationship to the liturgical year. . . . In its origins, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> For concision, “the feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple” will be rendered as “the Presentation” throughout the article.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, New York: Pueblo 1986.

<sup>3</sup> “Lazarus” is in quotation marks because there is a parallel to the Johannine Lazarus story in the quotations from the Secret Gospel of Mark from Clement of Alexandria.

‘Lent’ has nothing to do with Easter at all but everything to do with the final training of candidates for baptism.’<sup>4</sup>

The same might have been so of the forty-day period of preparation for baptism that was eventually wrought into what is today observed as Lent by many Christian churches. Thomas Talley wrote that “the fast of forty days had its origins at Alexandria where it followed immediately upon the celebration of Jesus’ baptism in Jordan and where it was concluded with the conferral of baptism in a celebration associated with one whom we know as Lazarus.”<sup>5</sup> Talley continued by citing what he called a “pregnant parenthesis” from Gregory Dix’s *The Shape of the Liturgy*: “An historical commemoration would strictly have required that Lent should follow immediately upon Epiphany, after this had been accepted as the commemoration of our Lord’s baptism.”<sup>6</sup> Talley suggested that the period ended with a commemoration of the raising of Lazarus and that “a fully baptismal liturgy” was celebrated when this pericope was proclaimed, a day “whose general outline is the same as that for the Epiphany.”<sup>7</sup> Neither he nor Dix, however, offered evidence of an assembly in which such a commemoration of Lazarus and a full baptismal liturgy were celebrated together in the middle of February.

The post-Epiphany forty-day span was eventually grafted on to Holy Week, leading up to Easter, but with the key change that it no longer *followed* a major feast, as it had followed Epiphany in Egypt, but it *anticipated* a major feast, Easter, a significant temporal change. The earliest evidence of the forty-day span in anticipation of Easter is a paschal letter of Athanasius from the year 330.<sup>8</sup> Egyptian resistance to relinquishing its initiation traditions is clear from the late introduction of Easter baptisms there, which appear for the first time only at the start of the patriarchate of Theophilus of Alexandria in 385.<sup>9</sup> If Talley’s proposal is accepted, then we take it from this that the forty-day, pre-Easter period now called Lent

<sup>4</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson, “From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent” in Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings in Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press 1995) 118-36; here at 135-36.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas J. Talley, “The Origin of Lent at Alexandria” in Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press 2000) 183-206; here at 183.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre 1945) 354-55.

<sup>7</sup> Talley, “The Origin of Lent at Alexandria,” 186.

<sup>8</sup> Talley, *Origins*, 168: “Prior to Nicea, no record exists of such a forty-day fast before Easter. Only a few years after the council, however, we encounter it in most of the Church as either a well-established custom or one that become so nearly universal as to impinge on those churches that have not yet adopted it.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 195. It is odd that evidence of the span of pre-paschal forty days appears in Egypt relatively early, but the paschal baptismal rite, evident in many other churches earlier, is received by Egypt a half-century later.

resulted from the merger, on the one side, of this Alexandrian post-Epiphany forty-day span and, on the other side, from a pre-Easter span of a different kind in other churches.<sup>10</sup> A missing link between the two traditions remains, however, for we do not know of a church in which there was a day—as posited by Talley—dedicated to a full baptismal liturgy in the middle of February, at which was proclaimed the narrative *de Lazaro*.

With the restoration of the catechumenate, many Christian communities have enthusiastically taken up the banner of paschal baptism, so doing, some posit, because this is “what the early church did,” though this simplest solution is not likely (and not usually) the most accurate. In spite of the amount of evidence on this in Talley’s work, there has been no reliable evidence offered regarding what feast ended the forty-day, post-Epiphany span. Talley himself asked, “If . . . we are to think of that imitation of the fast of Jesus as immediately following the Epiphany, what is to be said of the time of baptism in such a scheme?”<sup>11</sup> A little further along, he confesses that “while there seems no way to present a very coherent picture of all these developments, it does appear that in their totality they represent an attempt to harmonize two traditions, one that had known a fast of forty days after Epiphany and another that had, as early as 340, situated that fast before Easter.”<sup>12</sup>

Maxwell Johnson candidly highlighted another missing element when he asked: “How does this Alexandrian forty-day post-Epiphany fast become the pre-paschal Lent? For this there is no clear or easy answer.”<sup>13</sup> There is indeed no easy answer, yet the evidence is here tweaked to raise new questions about what might have happened in the liturgy on the fortieth day after Epiphany; to posit questions and juggle the evidence about the Presentation toward a deeper understanding of how the post-Epiphany forty-day span might have been changed from *de Lazaro* to *de Presentatione Domini*; to consider if there are remnants of an initiation liturgy in the sermons from that day; and to consider why the Lazarus narrative eventually gravitated toward Easter.

### III. Evidence from Jerusalem for the Presentation

The first textual evidence of the Presentation, as with so many things about the calendar in the early centuries, comes from the diary of the pilgrim Egeria (traveling

<sup>10</sup> See Talley, *Origins*, passim.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>13</sup> “Preparation for Pascha? Lent in Christian Antiquity” in *idem*, ed., *Between Memory and Hope*, 207-22; here at 218.

c. 381–384), who, in the Holy Land on the date when the narrative of Simeon was proclaimed, related:

The fortieth day after Epiphany is indeed celebrated here with the greatest solemnity. On that day there is a procession into the Anastasis, and all assemble there for the liturgy; and everything is performed in the prescribed manner with the greatest solemnity, just as on Easter Sunday. All the priests give sermons, and the bishop, too; and all preach on the Gospel text describing how on the fortieth day Joseph and Mary took the Lord to the temple, and how Simeon and Anna the prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, saw Him, and what words they spoke on seeing the Lord, and of the offering which His parents brought. Afterwards, when all the ceremonies have been performed in the prescribed manner, the Eucharist is then celebrated and the dismissal given.<sup>14</sup>

A question about the account of the celebration from Egeria's narrative is whether there might have been some initiatory indications in her description that "everything is performed in the prescribed manner with the greatest solemnity, just as on Easter Sunday." Because we do not know from what community Egeria took her sojourn at the beginning of the penultimate decade of the fourth century, we cannot know if her comparison of the Presentation feast to Easter confirms that baptisms were included in the description of the day's observances as "just as on Easter Sunday," but it at least leaves the possibility open. This might seem like an odd suggestion, however, since the narrative of the Presentation hardly bears the gravity of the narratives that would usually have accompanied initiation rites.

With Egeria's reckoning in mind, calendrical arithmetic yields that the fortieth day from Epiphany, January 6, would have been February 14, the locus of the first evidence for *hypapante*, as the feast of the Presentation was (and is) called in Greek churches, or for the feast of the *occursus domini*, as it was called in Latin churches. The backward shift of twelve days in reckoning the day of the nativity, from January 6 to December 25, accounts for the shift of the Presentation from February 14 to February 2, where it has been celebrated in the West for a millennium and a half.

Those earliest extant names of the feast—*hypapante* in Greek, *occursus* in Latin—mean "meeting," and, with the pericope of the Presentation of the child

<sup>14</sup> George E. Gingras, *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage* (Ancient Christian Writers 38; New York: Newman Press 1970) 96-97. The translator suggests (n. 314, pp. 224-25) that, by Egeria's phrase *hic celebrantur*, "celebrated here," was meant that this was not a feast known to the pilgrim from her liturgical traditions back in the West; but it is at least possible that her emphasis was not in comparing the Jerusalem tradition in which the feast was celebrated to her home community's tradition of not celebrating it, but in comparing her community's relatively minor observance to the Jerusalem tradition where it was celebrated "with the greatest solemnity."

Jesus to Simeon and Anna in the Gospel of Luke, the meeting to which the name refers has been associated for centuries with the meeting of the old man, the aged prophetess, and the infant Jesus *in loco parentum*. Although Egeria recounts that the preaching was “on the Gospel text describing how on the fortieth day Joseph and Mary took the Lord to the temple,” the Gospel of Luke does not mention such a forty-day span between the birth and the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple.

The witness of Egeria is augmented by the testimony of a few others of the Jerusalem Christian community. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem for much of the second half of the fourth century (349–387), reveals—in a sermon on “the *meeting* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with Simeon, who took God in his arms”—that there were processions with lights and lamps; that Adam is exulted by the reception of Christ by Simeon; that the feast is linked to the narrative of Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea; that, as Israel wandered for forty years, so the church waits forty days after the virgin birth to celebrate the Presentation; and, finally, that the heavenly spouse, Christ, returns with the virgin mother of God to the marriage chamber as he is presented in the Temple.<sup>15</sup>

The last of these is a constant of the imagery for the theology of the Presentation, and it is captured in the antiphon that was a hymn in the Greek and then Latin traditions for the feast:

Decorate the marriage chamber, Zion, and receive Christ the King: bow down to Mary, who is the gate of heaven: for she carries the King of glory in a new light: the virgin carried the Son in her hands before the light-bearer: about whom Simeon, holding him in his arms, preached to the people that he would be the Lord of the living and the dead and the savior of the world.<sup>16</sup>

The metaphor of the wedding chamber appears elsewhere on the Presentation. Cyril of Jerusalem, for example, proclaims that “Today the heavenly spouse, with the mother of God, returns to his wedding chamber, as he is presented in the Temple.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The sermon from which this comes has variously been considered spuriously and correctly ascribed to Cyril. Current scholarship—see the *Supplementum* of the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (Turnholt: Brepols 1998) 197, no. 3592—attributes the sermon to Cyril. An earlier volume of the *Clavis*, 2 (Turnholt: Brepols 1974) 292, no. 3592, had it listed as spurious. For the authenticity of the sermon in its Georgian version, see J.-M. Saugey, *Un Homélie Melkite Bipartite: Le Manuscrit Beyrouth, Bibliothèque Orientale 510* (Louvain 1988) 280, no. 40; on the Arabic version, see idem, *Deux Panegyrika Melkites pour la seconde partie de l’Année Liturgique: Jérusalem S. Anne 38 et Harisa 37* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1986) 71-72, no. 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Liber Usualis Missae et Officii* (Paris: Desclée 1947) 1243-44.

<sup>17</sup> PG 33:1189; the metaphor is evident also in the preaching of Amphilochius; Germanus, Archbishop of Constantinople (c. 640–733); and Theodotus of Ancyra.

The Armenian Lectionary confirms what Egeria describes, as it lists the meeting of Simeon and Anna with the virgin mother and her child. Yet the lectionary also lists Gal 3:24-29 as the first reading on this day: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (3:27).<sup>18</sup> This text alone does not make an absolute case for baptism on the fortieth day after Epiphany, but it moves the evidence further in this direction.

References to the first man, Adam, and to the first couple, Adam and Eve, abound in other Greek sermons for the feast. (The provenance of the sermons on the Presentation is, in many cases, uncertain, but as rhetorical pieces, the juxtaposition of the theological elements on this day is the critical element, not the authorship.) Even though there seems to be little reason to find a narrative or theological link between the second creation account and the Lukan story of the Presentation, such connection appears in a sermon attributed to Jerusalem presbyter Hesy chius, in which the preacher related Adam and Eve to Simeon and Anna.<sup>19</sup> So too in a sermon ascribed to Modestus of Jerusalem one finds, uniquely, the primacy of place in the sermon to Anna rather than Simeon, as he preaches about the redemption of the “daughters of Eve” in Anna’s presence at the event.<sup>20</sup> The redemption of Adam in the feast of the Presentation is also part of the content in a sermon ascribed to Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in the Jerusalem sermons there are references to narratives of the Hebrew scriptures that were traditionally associated with initiation: on Noah and the ark on the feast of the Presentation,<sup>22</sup> and on Jonah and the whale,<sup>23</sup> both narratives heavy with water symbolism and both found in some lectionaries of initiation rites and church mosaics elsewhere in the early centuries.<sup>24</sup>

So what we find in Jerusalem (or attributed to Jerusalem) is that, though the narrative for the fortieth day after Epiphany is, at first sight, the Presentation story, which does not have strong baptismal indications, there were strong initiatory elements latent in Egeria’s comparing the day to Easter; in the timing of the feast forty days after Epiphany (even without a warrant from the Lukan narrative); in

<sup>18</sup> See Kenneth Stevenson, “The Origins and Development of Candlemas: A Struggle for Identity and Coherence,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 102 (1988) 316-46; here at 317.

<sup>19</sup> “On the Presentation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (PG 93:1468-78).

<sup>20</sup> “On Hypapante” (PG 86: 3275-78).

<sup>21</sup> “On Hypapante or on the Meeting with the Lord” (PG 87/3:3287-3302; here at 3298-99).

<sup>22</sup> PG 87/3:3300-1.

<sup>23</sup> “On the Prophet Simeon, and on the Gospel Text ‘Now let your servant,’ and on the Blessed Virgin Mary” (PG 86:237-52; here at 252).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Luigi Marcuzzi, *Aquileia: Geschichte-Kunst-Historische Stätten*, photos by Mario Zanette (Sacile: Zanette 1985) 42-45; G. Brusin, *Führer durch Aquileia* (Padova: Tipografia Antoniana 1978) 25.

many of the Old Testament narratives employed; in the theological emphases of the preaching for the day; in the ritual symbols, especially the light, highlighted in the preaching; and in the baptismal implications of the reading of Gal 3:24-29, as in the Armenian Lectionary.

#### IV. The Presentation in Other Eastern Churches

Nearly omnipresent in sermons on the Presentation are images of light. Sometimes the content is on the general word “light,” but frequently on instruments of light, “candles” and “lamps,” indicating that this was not just a theological metaphor but one connected to the rituals of the feast in many communities. This prevalence of light imagery is so for the Jerusalem church, as in all the witnesses already mentioned, and for other churches in other Eastern and then Western traditions.

The metaphor of light and of the use of candles for this feast is so pervasive for the Presentation that it appears in almost every ancient sermon, whether in Greek, Latin, or Syriac. Though one might think that the Lukan narrative itself, with Simeon’s canticle about a “light of revelation to the Gentiles,” would evoke such omnipresence, the length and depth of the reflections on light in the sermons seem to be much heavier than the light of the brief phrase in the Lukan narrative would warrant. Nearly all of the Eastern fathers mentioned so far, plus a few more, preach about light, about candles, or about lamps. Moreover, it was the ritual action with the lights, candles, and lamps, as well as the theological motif of illumination that was taken up in the Latin tradition, in Ambrose Autpertus (+784),<sup>25</sup> as well as in the ninth-century Regensburg Pontifical and in the ritual book of New Minster (c. 1070).<sup>26</sup>

Other initiation symbols appear too in the rhetoric from churches other than Jerusalem. A link between the Presentation and baptism appears very explicitly in the sermons of Amphilochius, the cousin of Gregory Nazianzus and bishop of Iconium (373–395). Amphilochius preached about baptism on this day, narrating how this child brought to the Temple had opened the heavens for the flood of Noah, how the child freed the ancestors from Egypt, led the nation through the divided

<sup>25</sup> Ambrosius Autpertus, *Sermo Ambrosii Autperti Presbyteri ad Monachos Monasterii Martyris Vincenti in Ypapante Sanctae Mariae in Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, ed. Robertus Weber (Turnholt: Brepols 1979) 983-1002; see especially 993.

<sup>26</sup> Franz Unterkircher, *Das Kollektar-Pontifikale des Bischofs Baturich von Regensburg (817–848)* (*Cod. Vindob. ser. no. 2762*) (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag 1962) 93-97; *The Missal of the New Minster, Winchester, Le Havre: Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 330*, ed. D.H. Turner (Henry Bradshaw Society 93; London 1962) 69-72.



Red Sea, and brought the people into the land flowing with milk and honey.<sup>27</sup> He even speaks on the Presentation of the linen garment, the *sindona*,<sup>28</sup> in which the body of Jesus was wrapped when it was taken down from the cross, a garment that is attested as a baptismal garment explicitly (and as an altar cloth) in the *Acts of Thomas*, the Gospel of Peter, and other sources.<sup>29</sup> The *sindona* is still more striking when one sees that the anonymous “Lazarus character” in the Secret Gospel of Mark approaches Jesus clothed only in a linen cloth, that is, a *sindona*.<sup>30</sup> There is no tradition of the *sindona* in connection with the Presentation narrative, but the “synoptic” version of the Lazarus story, as it is captured in the Secret Gospel of Mark, has the young man dressed in this garment, and this is the very garment about which Amphilochius preached in his long sermon on the Presentation. So, as in Jerusalem, where the testimony is strongest, there were striking elements in the celebration of the Presentation in other churches of Eastern Christianity, and many of these elements have initiatory bearing.

## V. The Presentation and the Palms

The gravity of initiation indications in the ancient Presentation sermons and the brevity and relative levity of the Lukan narrative about Simeon and Anna in the Temple suggest that the theology of the feast was deeper and older than the narrative that found a home there. Indeed, we discover that the story was added to the feast quite late in at least some churches of the East. In Homily 125 of Severus of Antioch (c. 465–538), for example, one discovers that the feast, though already celebrated in Jerusalem, had only recently been introduced to the community at Antioch and that it was not yet being celebrated in Constantinople: “In this city of Antioch, as you know, this kind of feast is not known. And even in Jerusalem, this feast is not ancient, but it has been recently introduced.” Severus continues that “one can say the same thing too about the feast known as ‘Baia,’ when a whole crowd, carrying palm-branches in their hands, accompany our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is mounted on a small donkey and enters into

<sup>27</sup> *Amphilochii Iconiensis Opera*, ed. Cornelius Datema (Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca 3; Turnholt: Brepols 1978) 11-73; here at 55.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>29</sup> See Frederick William Dander, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed., Chicago: Chicago University Press 2000) 924; G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon 1961–1968) 1233. The *sindona* is later used for the corporal (11th century), for the towel used in the foot-washing rite, and as a linen cloth for the altar: see Albert Blaise, *Lexicon Latinitatis Medii Aevi* (Turnholt: Brepols 1975) 848.

<sup>30</sup> See Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1973; on the linen cloth, see 175-78.

Jerusalem.”<sup>31</sup> Because in antiquity the narrative of the Palms had been linked to and followed the narrative of Lazarus, this piece on the novelty of the Presentation narrative in Antioch with the discourse on the palms in the same part of the sermon suggests that the Presentation had displaced the Lazarus narrative. As Talley demonstrates, Lazarus Saturday was traditionally paired with Palm Sunday, yet in this sermon Severus of Antioch links the new Presentation narrative with Palm Sunday. This was a period during which narratives of Jesus’ infancy—birth, innocents, magi—were being moved toward December–January, while narratives of the end of his life—such as Lazarus and the palm-bearers—were moved toward Easter.

A link between the Presentation and Lazarus also appears in a sermon of Leontius, presbyter of Constantinople, who, preaching on Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, used the language of “meeting,” *hypapante*.<sup>32</sup> When he speaks about the narrative of Lazarus, this day is juxtaposed to Palm Sunday, as he says, “Tying the palm branches, we approach the meeting with the Lord, crying out and saying, ‘Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. To him be glory and the kingdom forever.’”<sup>33</sup> So even though the theologies of the narratives and the chronologies in the gospels make them quite dissimilar, the Presentation and the Palms are juxtaposed in a few places of the tradition.

## VI. Palimpsest of Initiation in the Narratives of Lazarus and the Presentation?

The juxtaposition of the Presentation and the Palms has more significance when we recall Talley’s evidence about the evolution of the liturgical year, in which he juxtaposes the Lazarus story and the Palms. His theory hinges on the hypothesis about the forty-day period after Epiphany that might have culminated in “the conferral of baptism in a celebration with one whom we know as Lazarus.”<sup>34</sup> Although there is a lacuna in the evidence about how the forty-day post-Epiphany period leading up to *de Lazaro* in mid-February came to be the forty-day pre-Easter period of preparation for Holy Week, one wonders if perhaps the February feast of the “meeting” had in an earlier time been referring to the pericope of the raising of Lazarus.

<sup>31</sup> *Les Homiliae cathedrales de Severe d’Antioche*, ed. R. Duval (Paris: Firmin-Didot 1906) 232-53; here at 246-49.

<sup>32</sup> See the *Supplementum* of the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, 310, no. 4639.

<sup>33</sup> Pseudo-Chrysostom, “On Martha, Mary, and Lazarus” (here at PG 61:706; Leontius’s sermon was at one time attributed to Chrysostom).

<sup>34</sup> See note 5 above.

Such questions and suggestions are supported by looking for symbols of initiation in the scriptural narratives. First, the vocabulary of the Lukan and Johannine narratives. The two words that are attached to the name of the Presentation feast in the Greek and Latin liturgical traditions, *hypapante* and *occursus*, do not appear in the Greek or Latin scriptural narratives of the Lukan pericope of the Presentation (2:22-38). Moreover, *occursus*, in verb or noun form, does not appear in the Latin of Egeria's description of the feast, even though she uses the word quite often in other parts of the diary.<sup>35</sup> There are five Greek words that might have been rendered into Vulgate forms of *occurrere*, "to meet," but none of these words—*apantao*, *apantesis*, *katantao*, *sunantao*, and *hypantao*—are used in the Lukan narrative of the Presentation, though they are used more than thirty times elsewhere in the New Testament.

The vocabulary of "meeting" in the Johannine narrative is also strengthened by a consideration of Egeria's description of the community's observance at the Lazarium, that is, the place from which Lazarus came out of the cave (John 11:44):

When it is getting to be dawn, at the first light on Saturday, the bishop officiates and offers the sacrifice at dawn on Saturday. Just as the dismissal is to be given, the archdeacon raises his voice and says: "Let us all make ready to be this day at the Lazarium at the seventh hour." And so, as it gets to be the seventh hour, everyone comes to the Lazarium, which is at Bethany, approximately two miles from the city. On the way from Jerusalem to the Lazarium, at about a half mile from that place, there is a church along the road at the very place where Mary, the sister of Lazarus, came forth to meet the Lord. When the bishop reaches this place, all the monks come forth to meet him, and the people go into the church, where a hymn and an antiphon are sung and the proper passage from the Gospel is read, describing how Lazarus' sister met the Lord.<sup>36</sup>

There is a clear emphasis here on various meetings, for the pilgrim stresses "the very place where Mary . . . came forth to meet the Lord." She speaks of "the monks coming forth to meet the bishop," and she reiterates the Gospel's description of "how Lazarus' sister met the Lord." Unlike the absence of such a meeting in Luke's narrative of the Presentation, the Gospel of John describes two meetings in the account of the raising of Lazarus, and, of the five Greek words for "meeting" mentioned earlier, the one used in both places of the Lazarus narrative (11:20,

<sup>35</sup> See D. R. Blackman and G. G. Betts, eds, *Concordantia in Itinerarium Egeria*, Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Gingras, *Egeria*, 102.

11:30) is *hypantao*, that which comes to name the feast on which the narrative of the Presentation eventually finds a home, *hypapante*. What might one draw from the vocabulary of these narratives?

And what of the light imagery, omnipresent in the Presentation sermons? The light in the Lukan narrative might be taken as a symbol of initiation, as in the canticle of Simeon: “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 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” (2:29-32). In Simeon’s song, the light is connected to salvation, as it would have been in an initiation rite. The Gospel of John often uses the contrasts of light and darkness for the presence and absence of God,<sup>37</sup> and here in this story too Jesus says, “Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them” (11:9-10). Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus had identified himself as the “light of the world” (8:12), and the gospel bears this light as on all those who are part of Jesus. Of the two narratives, Presentation and Lazarus both have light imagery, yet the Lazarus story has a deeper theological interpretation of the light than the Presentation story, as does the Gospel of John as a whole.

Also supportive of the possibility of baptism with the Lazarus story is the prominence of rhetoric about resurrection in the Lazarus narrative, for in it Jesus says, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him” (11:11); later in the story Jesus tells Martha, “Your brother will rise again” (11:23), to which she replies, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day,” but Jesus corrects her misunderstanding with one of the Johannine “I am” sayings: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (11:25-26). This is a period when the foundational narrative of Easter is itself shifting from the death of Jesus (*pascha-passio*) to the resurrection (*pascha-transitus*), and the resurrection content of the Lazarus story might have anticipated the fourth-century shift.

Another link between initiation and Lazarus comes not in Jesus’ words but at the exit of the dead and decomposing Lazarus from the tomb: “The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go’” (11:44). The vesture is not the *sindona* of canonical Mark or Secret Mark; the cloth in this canonical version of John is *soudarion*, which appears only twice in the Gospel, here on the face of Lazarus and in the empty tomb, where the body of Jesus had been

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, John 1:4-5, 7-9; 3:2, 19-21; 5:35; 8:12; 12:35-36, 44-46.

laid: Simon Peter “went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the *cloth* that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself” (20:6-7).

Still another perplexing element about Talley’s description of the fortieth day after Epiphany also supports a link between the Lazarus narrative and the date of the Presentation, and this is the remembrance that the “baptism of the apostles took place then,”<sup>38</sup> that is, at the end of the post-Epiphany forty-day period. There is a theological and narrative warrant in the Lazarus story, however, that might have been a basis for this perplexing ingredient, for after Jesus and the disciples have heard that Lazarus is dead, the disciple Thomas says to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go [with Lazarus], that we may die with him” (11:16). In the Pauline theology of baptism as participation in the death of Christ, usually held up as a counter to the Johannine theology of new birth, such a “dying with him” might well be a metaphor for the baptism they would receive from Jesus and that contributed to the tradition of marking Jesus’ baptizing the disciples on the fortieth day after Epiphany. By itself, this would not be the strongest indication for initiation in February with the proclamation of the Lazarus story, but it is one that, combined with the others, gives the Lazarus narrative an initiation link that is not present in the Presentation story.

With the foregoing issues in mind as well as with the theology of the incarnate life of Jesus of Nazareth as a meeting of heaven and earth, one can see that the Lazarus story, with its vocabulary of “meeting,” would have been a more apt narrative expression of the rite than that of the Presentation. Moreover, the Presentation pericope—a kind of meeting, even without the word itself—would have been a fitting substitute story if the Lazarus story gravitated toward Easter. Indeed the narrative, if not the word, of the *meeting* of Simeon, Anna, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph would have been fitting as a story with light, yet one more appropriate to the beginning of the liturgical year as it was being constructed as a time for the proclamation of infancy stories.

Although there is no remnant in the tradition of a church in which the Lazarus narrative was celebrated in February with baptisms, the Lazarus narrative itself has strong baptismal symbols: the light, the cloth wrapped around the Lazarus character in the Secret Gospel’s account, as well as the issues of resurrection and the apostles’ dying with Christ. Moreover, the name bequeathed to the Presentation, the “meeting,” is a word with strong testimony in the Lazarus story and in Egeria’s account of what happened at the Lazarium, but with no precedent in the vocabulary of Luke’s Presentation story.

<sup>38</sup> Talley, *Origins*, 198; he takes this from the fourteenth-century Abu ‘l-Barakat. See also *ibid.*, 203.

## VII. The Presentation in the West

As we turn from the Greek and Syriac theology and preaching on the Presentation to the Latin tradition and theology of the day, there is a marked change in the weight of the feast and in the content of the preaching and liturgical prayers.<sup>39</sup> The sermons are far fewer and later than in the Eastern tradition, and the content is not as theologically consequential or grave. Moreover, the matters of the Western sermons switch from a focus on the child Jesus, Simeon, and Anna to a concentrated focus on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Though the day is called a “solemnity,” some of the Latin preachers note that their assemblies do not recognize how important the feast is in the church’s tradition.<sup>40</sup> The title and content of the feast become the “Purification of Mary.” By the time of the Latin sermons, Christmas (on December 25) has been universally received by Western churches, so the feast is no longer in mid-February but on February 2, where it has remained in the Latin tradition.

There are some theological elements in the West that were highlighted in the Eastern sermons. The issue of the sin of Adam, original sin, for example, is common in the Purification preaching of the Venerable Bede. Also striking in Bede is that he quotes from the Lazarus narrative as he preaches on the feast of the Purification of Mary: “I am the resurrection and the life; anyone who believes in me, even if he dies, will live; and all who live and believe in me will not die in eternity.”<sup>41</sup>

As the primogenitor, Adam, appears in some of the rhetoric of the West for the Presentation, so does he appear on the other side of the continent in a sermon on Lazarus. One finds that, a few centuries before Bede, down on the eastern side of the Italian peninsula, Chromatius of Aquileia, who was the bishop in this metropolitan church from c. 388 to 407, links the narrative of Adam and that of Lazarus. In a sermon on the “resuscitation of Lazarus,” Chromatius makes the link between the question of the Lord to Mary and Martha, “Where have you put

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed chronology of the feast of the Purification of Mary, see I. Deug-Su, “La festa della purificazione in Occidente (secoli IV–VIII),” *Studi Medievali* 15 (1974) 143-216. Some study of the feast in the West has focused on its coincidence with the pagan celebration of *Lupercalia*. Though not part of this study, the primary source on the pagan origins is Pope Gelasius I, *Lettre contre Les Lupercales et dix-huit messes du Sacramentaire léonien*, ed. G. Pomarès (Paris: Cerf 1959) 20-51, 161-89; also in PL 59:110-16. For secondary literature, see Pierre Batiffol, *Études de liturgie et d’archéologie chrétienne* (Paris: Lecoffre 1919) 193-215; D. DeBruyne, “L’Origine des Processions de la Chandeleur et des Rogations a propos d’un Sermon Inédit,” *Revue Benedictine* 34 (1922) 14-26.

<sup>40</sup> *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, 985.

<sup>41</sup> *Homilia* 18 in *Bedae Opera* (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 122; Turnholt: Brepols 1955) 128-33; here at 131. The same homily is available, though not in a critical edition, in PL 94:79-83.

him?" (John 11:34), and the question of the Lord God to the primogenitor, "Where are you, Adam?" (Gen 3:9).<sup>42</sup> Bede connects Adam to the Presentation, while Chromatius connects Adam to Lazarus.

While the theology of the Presentation in the West is generally less potent than it had been in the Jerusalem tradition or in other Eastern churches, it is striking that the Latin tradition of the Presentation maintains or takes up ritual practices that are linked to the initiatory content that was found in the East. Such practices include the stational character of the feast, the rite of the blessing of candles, and even, in the late medieval period, the rubrics for a change of vestments in the mass of the day.

First, the stational character of the feast. From its earliest datum, in Egeria, it is clear that the liturgy of the Presentation was stational, for she recorded that "there is a procession into the Anastasis." Evidence of such processions on the Presentation emerges from many of those ancient sermons, and the processions on the Presentation continue even as the theology of the feast moves from East to West and changes significantly in the Middle Ages. In Rome, for example, the feast took hold, but by the time there is clear evidence of it there, in the ninth century, the celebration's character is quite penitential. The elements of the Presentation narrative that are emphasized in sermons shift from those concentrating on the presentation of the child Jesus to the purification of Mary. The theology built upon the issue of Mary's purification is the pastoral encouragement toward penance and purification, and the processional character reflects the journey of faith through penitence.<sup>43</sup> Yet this shift does not stem the stational character, as can be seen from the note about processions in the *Liber Pontificalis*, of Pope Sergius I (687–701), where one finds "that on the days of the Annunciation of the Lord, the Falling-Asleep and the Nativity of the ever-virgin Mary, the Holy Mother of God, and of Saint Symeon, which the Greeks call *ypapante*, a procession should be made from Saint Hadrian's."<sup>44</sup> This is so also in the description of the feast according to the Ordo of Saint Armand, which recounts, even with the penitential elements, that the people and the clergy processed with candles and sang, moving through the city of Rome from the church of Saint Hadrian to the Basilica of Saint Mary

<sup>42</sup> *Chromatii Aquileiensis Opera*, ed. R. Étaix and J. Lemarié (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 9A; Turnholt: Brepols 1979) 123-27.

<sup>43</sup> Eventually the penitential aspect of the feast will appear in the East also: see Stevenson, "The Origins and Development of Candlemas," 325, and the brief article of M. Higgins, "Note on the Purification (and Date of the Nativity) in Constantinople in 602," *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 2 (1952) 81-83.

<sup>44</sup> *Liber Pontificalis* 14; as quoted in Stevenson, "The Origins and Development of Candlemas," 330.

Major.<sup>45</sup> As the traditions about the Presentation spread, the processions were inculturated and incorporated into the ritual traditions of the spaces in religious communities and parishes.

Second, the blessing of the candles. As seen in Eastern testimonies to the Presentation, evidence of the use of lights, candles, and lamps was widespread.<sup>46</sup> So in the West, too, the tradition was adopted and taken up as the blessing of candles, which continued to accompany the rite even as the narrative theology of the feast moved from the presentation of Jesus in the Temple toward the purification of Mary, a theological concentration for the feast in the West for centuries. The candle-blessing element appeared as an addendum to liturgical books in the ninth and tenth centuries,<sup>47</sup> but came to be received into the Latin tradition within a few centuries. The various rites of the feast become more elaborate in the later Middle Ages, and some communities have remnants of a blessing of the new fire, a provocative link with the development of the rite of the Easter vigil in the Middle Ages.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, written by William Durandus, bishop of Mende, in the late thirteenth century, is one of the Christian tradition's earliest witnesses to the existence of and reasons for the liturgical colors in the course of the liturgical year. Durandus wrote that "on the feast of Hypapante, violet or black is to be used in the procession before mass."<sup>49</sup> Then the color changed to white for the mass. This change of color from violet (or black) to white persisted in the tradition for centuries. In the *Memoriale Rituum* of Pope Benedict XIII, for example, we discover that two antependia were to cover the main altar for the Presentation (by then called the Purification of Mary), a purple one over white, so that the purple could be readily removed after the procession and when mass would begin.<sup>50</sup> Decorated even more than the altar-front were the clergy: amice, alb, cincture, stole, and purple cope for the main celebrant. They would remain so clad through the rite of the blessing of the candles, the distribution of them, the singing of numerous antiphons, the Canticle of Simeon, Psalm 43, the procession, the antiphon (as earlier) *Adorna thalamum tuum, Sion*, and a responsory. At

<sup>45</sup> Adrian Nocent, *The Liturgical Year I* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1977) 328.

<sup>46</sup> Stevenson points out that the use of candles began in the middle of the fifth century, according to the witness of Cyril of Scythopolis, in his *Vita Theodosii*: "Then the blessed Mikelia, having practiced all manner of piety, was the first to introduce the celebration of our Lord with candles" ("The Origins and Development of Candlemas," 323-24).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>49</sup> Michel Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Age*, volume 3: *Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1940) 656-59.

<sup>50</sup> *Memoriale Rituum pro aliquibus praestantioribus sacris functionibus persolvendis in minoribus Ecclesiis Parochialibus* (Ratisbonae: Georgius Josephus Manz 1862) 2.



last, as the mass was to begin, the cleric would remove the purple cope and stole, and put on (or “be clothed by a second and third cleric,” as the rubrics prescribe) a white maniple, stole, and chasuble.<sup>51</sup> In spite of the distraction of all the changes, the significant link in the liturgical year is recognized because this change of color from the start of the procession to the mass happened only twice in the year, at the Presentation and at the Easter vigil. This remained, elaborately so, until the reform of the liturgy after Vatican II.

Although the Presentation takes a turn when inculturated into the Latin traditions, tenacious in its tradition are some of the deepest initiation elements, both in theology and in rite. The theological themes that persist into the West are the links to Adam and to resurrection of Christ, while the ritual links are to the use of light; to the processional, stationary character of the liturgy; and to the theology of the marriage chamber in the hymn *Adorna thalamum*.

### VIII. Methodology and the Study of the Liturgical Year

Scholarship on the liturgical year has prompted critical re-examination of some of the presumptions about the links between rites and feasts in the year, as highlighted in the works cited at the beginning of this essay. This essay on the Presentation provides an occasion to consider not just the *feasts* on which the rites were (or were not) celebrated, but to consider also the *narratives* associated with the rites, a different, if sometimes related, issue. For some parts of the year, particularly in the early period, the scriptural narratives—such as the raising of Lazarus—may have been more closely linked to rites than were the dates and times of the year.

Our investigations traditionally seek a connection between a date or feast of the year and a rite, but this investigation raises the likelihood that the narratives and the rites might have been more closely tied to one another than were the times and the rites. There was likely a wedding of scriptural narratives and rites in the early centuries even before the narratives were ascribed to a particular time of the year. The New Testament narratives and letters came from worshipping communities in the first and second centuries, so we can be sure that the narratives were the fruits of the rites long before the feasts and seasons emerged or were secured. Because of this, the narratives and the rites had a deeper and more ancient link than did the feasts of the year and the rites. The particularities of this essay on the Presentation and the Lazarus story have demonstrated, if in complex form, that considering the link between the narratives of the New Testament and the rites might shed new light on some of the issues in the study of the origins of the liturgical year.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-14.