



FEBRUARY 2017

*Candles, Groundhogs and Being Light*



My dear friends,

As I write this letter, it is Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>—the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, also known as Candlemas and, of course, Groundhog Day. Presentation, Candles and Groundhogs. What these three have in common? It's all about light.

**The Feast of the Presentation or Candlemas** commemorates Jesus being brought to the Temple in Jerusalem by Mary and Joseph 40 days after he was born. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus and his parents were met by Simeon who called Jesus the "Light of the World."

**Why the Name Candlemas?** Christians would bring the candles needed for winter to church on Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> to be blessed by the priest. It also relates to elements of paganism. Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, midway between the winter solstice and spring equinox, was the pagan Festival of Lights.

**Why Ground Hogs?** Germans, settling in Pennsylvania, brought to their new home their Candlemas tradition—using an animal to predict how long winter would be. Originally hedgehogs were used, but groundhogs are more plentiful in Pennsylvania, and thus a tradition is born.



**It's all about light.** Before electricity, candlelight and firelight were the only way to extend the light of day into long, cold and dark winter evenings. Marking passage through winter, toward spring, is an important part of human society. Candlemas and by extension Groundhog Day mark our passage toward Spring, toward warmth and light. It's no accident that we celebrate this journey when Jesus—the light of the world—is presented to the world. For the first time, Jesus goes beyond the confines of his village and family, and is presented in the Temple. He is recognized and named by Simeon and the light of the world is shining out! Jesus is light and we are filled with that light. We let it shine, undimmed. Cold and dark can have no effect on this true and eternal light. So in the dark of winter, we shine with the light of Jesus.

Your sister in Christ,

Mother Bonnie