

Festivals of Lights

La Chandeleur - Candlemas ; Hanukkah ; Diwali ; Eid al-Fitr

La Chandeleur or Candlemas in English takes place every year on 2nd February.

The origin and meaning of Candlemas :

Candlemas is a Christian holiday celebrated every February 2, or 40 days after Christmas. The term Candlemas comes from "festival of candles", itself translated from the Latin *festus candelarum*. For the faithful, it is a question of celebrating the fact that "Jesus is light", as well as the purity of the virgin Mary.

Indeed, Candlemas commemorates the presentation of Jesus to the Temple, Jewish tradition requiring that each male firstborn in the family is brought to the Temple 40 days after birth to be consecrated to the Lord. This 40-day period corresponds to the period during which mothers were considered unclean by Jewish law after giving birth, so they were prohibited from going to a place of worship. Once this period had elapsed, mothers could go to the temple to perform an animal sacrifice and thus regain their purity.

On the day Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple, Luke's gospel says that a man named Simeon came there, moved by the Holy Spirit and the promise that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. There he took Jesus in his arms and said that Jesus would be 'a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel'.

It is therefore this precise religious event that Christians remember during Candlemas. However, it seems that this festival has more ancient origins, and could be

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the resumption of a Roman rite, the *amburbiales*, linked to the purification of the city of Rome. It was a rite celebrated with torch processions around Rome.

It is thought that the Christianization of this pagan rite was created either by Pope Gelasius I (in 494AD) or by the Emperor Justinian (in an edict of 542AD).

The Candlemas Celebration

In the Catholic religion, at Candlemas candles are blessed, and there is then a candlelight procession to the church where a solemn mass takes place. The procession is to remind the faithful of the journey that Joseph and Mary took, carrying Jesus to the Temple. At the end of this Mass, people take home a candle to which purifying virtues are attributed according to local or national traditions.

Candlemas in popular culture: pancakes

Today, in a similar way to Mardi Gras and in English-speaking countries Shrove Tuesday, the festival is associated with pancakes that are cooked on the day. This is a tradition that can be traced back to the custom of distributing pancakes to pilgrims coming to Rome, or more simply, to remember that the end of winter is approaching and that we still have reserves of food.

When cooking the first pancake, it is common to toss it into the air several times in a row to ward off bad luck for the coming year. An old French tradition says that the peasants used to do this by holding a coin in their left hand (a louis d'or for the richest) in order to attract happiness and prosperity.

Adapted from : <https://icalendrier.fr/religion/fetes-catholiques/chandeleur/>

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The practice of associating the Festival of Lights with the consumption of a "fatty" dessert is also found in the Jewish tradition, which consists of eating donuts during the feast of Hanukkah ; Judaism's Festival of Lights which is held in November/December of each year.

In Asian countries, people celebrate a Festival of Lights known as Deepavali or Diwali, an important Hindu festival but also celebrated by Jains and Sikhs, at the end of the calendar year, normally in late October or November. The celebrations take place over five days and include lighting candles, setting off firecrackers and eating sweet foods.

And in the Muslim festival of Eid al-Fitr, which lasts over two to three days, sweet dishes are prepared and homes are often decorated with lanterns, twinkling lights or flowers.

Candlemas around the world :

In Luxembourg, the current tradition retains the torchlight procession as children walk the streets in groups on the evening of February 2, holding a lantern or a baguette. They sing traditional songs hoping to receive sweets in return.

In Mexico, Candlemas is a public holiday, but also an opportunity to eat tamales, corn flour-based pancake-like wraps that can be savoury or sweet and filled with meat or fruit.

In addition, in the United States and Canada, February 2 is associated with another holiday, "Groundhog Day" where traditionally, people watch the reaction of a groundhog (marmotte) coming out of its burrow. If it comes out and does not see its

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shadow (due to a cloudy sky), it is a sign that winter will end soon. On the contrary, if it sees its shadow (due to a clear sky), it means that the winter will last another 6 weeks !

So Happy Candelmas - Bonne Chandeleur everyone !

Vous pouvez trouver plus d'informations sur les autres festivals en suivant ces liens :

Mardi Gras :

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mardi_gras

Shrove Tuesday :

<https://www.calendarpedia.com/when-is/shrove-tuesday.html>

Hanukkah :

<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanoucca>

Diwali :

<https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divali>

Groundhog Day :

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jour_de_la_marmotte

Eid al-Fitr :

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%AAtes_musulmanes

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