



Christmastide is the name given to the Christmas season in the liturgical calendar beginning on Christmas Eve and ending on the Sunday celebrating the Baptism of the Lord. This usually gives us a **Christmas season of around 20 days** or so.

In the older tradition, **before the Second Vatican Council, the Christmas season lasted a whole 40 days, echoing the 40 days of Lent.**

The liturgical calendar of the Extraordinary Form of the Mass still celebrates an extended Christmas, so even today in some Churches people will find themselves in the Christmas season until February 2nd, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Following 25th December we have seven days designed to extend our focus on the mystery of Christ's birth. During these days, we're to take in all the joys and graces associated with such a momentous event.

These days are called the "Octave of Christmas," and you can remember their timing because the Octave starts and ends with solemnities - the Nativity of the Lord on December 25, and Mary, Mother of God on January 1st. Both are Holy Days of Obligation.

Some Churches like to preserve the older tradition of 40 days, and leave the crib scene in place until the 2nd February which is the Feast of the Purification or Candlemass.

Candlemas commemorates the ritual purification of Mary, 40 days after the birth of her son Jesus. This day also marks the ritual presentation of the baby Jesus to God in the Temple at Jerusalem.

The Gospel of Luke says that Jesus was met by Anna and Simeon. Simeon held the baby Jesus and called him a Light to the World.

Ritual purification stems back to a Jewish tradition that women were considered unclean after the birth of a child. For 40 days for a boy, and 60 days for a girl, women weren't allowed to worship in the temple. At the end of this time, women were brought to the Temple or Synagogue to be purified.

After the ceremony women were allowed to take part in religious services again.

The festival is called Candlemas because this is the day that Church's candles can be blessed.

On Candlemas night, many people place lighted candles in their windows at home.

Like some other Christian festivals, Candlemas draws some of its elements from pre Christianity when it was a festival of light. This ancient festival marked the mid point of winter, half way between the winter solstice (shortest day) and the spring equinox.

In those days many people believed that Candlemas predicted the weather for the rest of the winter.

If Candlemas Day be fair and bright

Winter will have another fight.

If Candlemas Day brings cloud and rain,

Winter won't come again.

Any Christmas decorations not taken down by Twelfth Night (January 5th) should be left up until Candlemas Day and then taken down.