According to tradition, in the Chapel of St. Stephen in the Armenian Monastery of Sts. James in Jerusalem stands the baptismal font where St. Cyril baptized many pagans into Christianity. He died in the year 386 A.D.

— Translated from "Soorpk Yev Donk"
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PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD TO THE TEMPLE

February 14

On February 14, the Armenian Church celebrates *Dyarnuntarach*, literally "the bringing forward of the Lord." Since it is an unmovable feast, i.e is always marked on that date (40 days after Armenian Christmas, January 6), it shares its day with the highly visible American holiday, Valentine's Day. In the wake of heart-sharped cards and boxed chocolates, the feast of the Presentation often goes unnoticed except by the clergy and the few at church. And yet, it is an observance that directs us to important truths.

The story behind the feast of the Presentation of the Lord is told in the Gospel of Luke 2:22-40. The incident described is really a combination of two Jewish rituals followed by any pious family of Jesus' time. After a woman had given birth, she would stay in isolation for a prescribed period of time. She would then go to the temple and offer a pigeon and a lamb as offerings of atonement and would thus be "purified." This ritual is detailed in chapter 12 of the Old Testament book of law, Leviticus.

Secondly, it was a long and multi-layered tradition of the Jews to dedicate their first-born son to God at a ritual once again enacted at the sanctuary. At one time, every first-born child or domestic animal was to be consecrated to God (Exodus 13:2), and for the first-born (eventually only sons) this meant service at a local sanctuary. Once the priestly tribe of Levites became the official ministers of the sanctuaries, the first-borns were only symbolically dedicated and "redeemed" through the payment of a small gift to the sanctuary.

This was, then, what took Mary and Joseph to the temple. Mary sought to 1) be purified and 2) symbolically present Jesus before God, dedicating the baby to his service very much as Hannah offered up her infant son Samuel (I Samuel 1:19-28).

These two events in the life of Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus are remembered on *Dyarnuntarach*. Other names used for this feast are *Derendas* (possibly a contraction of *Dyarnuntarach*) and *Candlemas*. The latter is a reference to how the devout Simeon, who received Jesus from Mary at the temple that day, referred to Jesus as the "light of revelation." On *Dyarnuntarach* evening, Armenians lit candles during the church service, carried the flame out into the darkness (symbolically bringing light into the void) and either took it home to light their own lamps or a home fire or lit a courtyard fire around which young people often danced and celebrated (combining pre-Christian and Christian rituals.)

When we consider the humble and holy family that traveled to the temple almost 2,000 years ago to participate in religious rites even more ancient, we might prayerfully reflect that:

1. The Son of God is a real person, fully human. In his presentation at the temple, he took part in the totality of everyday human life and thereby repeatedly graced it with meaning and purpose. Although we are granted a precious few details of Jesus' life, this is one of them.

2. God is real to Mary and Joseph. In every moment of their lives, his presence and divine vision have charted their course. They listened for his voice and as all such people do, they kept hearing it. And when it was time to leave their private decisions and lives and join God's community, they did so, not only out of a devotion and commitment that was culturally determined but out of a determination into which they had been newly called.

3. Being real, God's purpose became the guiding principle of this family. It is not primarily the Son of God that Mary and Joseph take to the temple—for he