

St. Joseph's Family Activities

February Saints and Celebrations



<https://www.theannunciation.org.uk/resources/>

stjoe.fam.activities@gmail.com

The Saints Reflect the Light of Christ for us.

February sees the very end of “Christmas” with the Feast of the Presentation in the Temple, or The Feast of the Purification of Our Lady, or Candlemas as it is also called. It's a lovely time to decorate some candles for a prayer corner. The saints are men and women who by the grace of the Holy Spirit, have reflected Christ's light in their lives. We could think that what they did is beyond us, but each one of us is called to be a saint, to be holy, as Jesus said, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

We cannot respond to Christ in our own strength, but only by the grace which comes in abundance from Christ. This grace is first received in Baptism and regular reception of the sacraments as well as regular prayer and reading of the Bible keeps us “topped up.”

Lent begins this month and maybe it would be an opportunity to find out about more of the saints. We are familiar with “giving up” something for Lent (fasting) but Lent is also a time of extra prayer and giving alms. Maybe we could be inspired by the saints to pray more, and pray to them as our intercessors?

These activities reflect the four dimensions of our faith, as in everything we do, we are either learning or proclaiming the faith, celebrating it in the liturgy and the sacraments, living it in the context of the family and community and praying it.

The Holy Spirit window about the Bernini Sculpture of St. Peter's Chair in St Peter's Basilica, Rome. The same Holy Spirit who led and guided the Apostles also leads and guides us, the Church to Christ who leads us to His Father in heaven.



There are three dimensions to the Church: those of us here on earth, journeying to the Father in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit; those in purgatory whose lives on earth have finished and who are being purified, and those in heaven, sharing in the divine life, for which we have all been created. For them, their joy is complete but because of that, they are eager for us to join them. Close to Our Lord, they intercede (pray) for us. The saints in heaven are more than the canonised saints the Church knows of, as the author of the Book of Revelation says, “I looked and saw a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, tribe and peoples and tongues...” (Rev.7:9).

The saints are our heroes. They come from all walks of life, from all around the world and all ages. We can always find a saint who inspires us and ask him or her to pray for us. So, celebrate your own saints' days, go to Mass if you can as there, the whole Church is united! We can't see the saints, but we join in with their praise in the Holy Holy Holy. Have something special to eat, light your baptism candle or another one if you don't have it, and regard the saints as special members of the family.

1st February, St. Brigid of Ireland

As with many of the early Irish saints, not a lot of detail is known about St. Brigid, the foremost woman saint of Ireland. Born a pagan, near Dundalk in about 451, she converted to Christianity after hearing St. Patrick preach. She founded a monastery at Kildare for both men and women (Ireland's first women's monastic community) where she died in 525. The origin of "St. Brigid's cross" (traditionally made on this day), is also shrouded in mystery. Tradition says that she used it to explain the meaning of Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension to a seriously ill chieftain. He was so impressed that he was baptised and died holding the cross to his breast. We can reflect on two main questions here;

1. Who has impressed us with their teaching about Jesus?
2. What can we say to other people about Jesus?

Make a St. Brigid's Cross.

The cross pictured here was given to me and I treasure it dearly as my confirmation saint is "Brigid". Why don't you have a go at making one - if you can't get hold of rushes, use paper straws.



Here is a link to a website that shows how to make St. Brigid Crosses, and if you do make any, please send me photos to share.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yn_MG4HZVOo

2nd February, Feast of the Presentation in the Temple, or Candlemas



Today's feast has three names.

1. Purification of Mary
2. Presentation in the Temple
3. Candlemas.

Read Luke 2:22-32 and see if you can work out why this feast has these three names.

1. Why is the feast called the "Purification of Mary"?

Because it was the mother who needed to be "purified" after giving birth and this happened when a sacrifice was made in the temple.

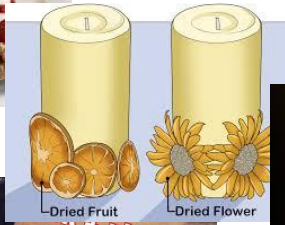
2. Why is today's feast called the "Presentation in the Temple"?

Because the Law said that the first born male (boy) was to be consecrated to God - that is dedicated to God. (Note - just because Jesus is referred to as the "firstborn" does not mean that Mary had other children, which she did not. An only child is also a firstborn child.) As of course we can't kill children to sacrifice them to God, parents were asked to make a sacrifice of an animal instead. Usually this would be a goat or if you were rich, a bull, but Mary and Joseph could not afford these, so they sacrificed two small birds. That was all that they could afford.

3. Why Candlemas?

Note the words of Simeon, who said that his eyes have seen the salvation which was promised. That is Jesus - and he says that He (Jesus) is a light to enlighten the pagans. Later on Jesus would call say about Himself "I am the light of the World"(Jn. 8:12). We light candles to remind us that Jesus shows us the way to live - He helps us to "see".

On the next page are some suggestions on how you can decorate your own candles.



I found these pictures by looking online, with the exception of the large one on the left, which was made in a workshop with children in the parish.

Acrylic paint works well on candles (just make sure that clothes are well-protected).

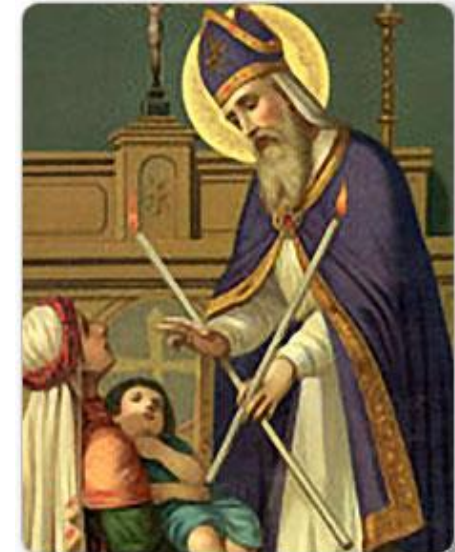
As ever, if you make any, please send me photos to share.

3rd February: St. Blaise:



He was bishop of Sebaste and was martyred, probably early in the fourth century. Devotion to him spread throughout the Church during the Middle Ages. We traditionally ask him to pray for protection of our throats, and often, after Mass on this day, priests would bless throats with a pair of crossed candles like this (on the left) calling upon St. Blaise to protect us from diseases of the throat.

*Through the intercession of St Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from ailments of the throat and from every other evil.
† In the Name of the Father, and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. †*



4th February, St. Gilbert of Sempringham

Gilbert was the son of an Anglo-Norman lord of Sempringham in Lincolnshire. He was sent to Paris to study and on being ordained priest, returned to his native Lincolnshire as clerk to the bishop of Lincoln. Becoming parish priest of Sempringham, unusually for those days he wanted to make sure that girls received an education. Seven of his former pupils wanted to become nuns. There was nowhere for them to go so Gilbert started a community for them by building a cloister and house for them to the north of his parish church. His bishop, Alexander of Lincoln gave him his full support, as did the King, Henry II. Gradually, the community grew, and Gilbert invited some men to be priests and confessors and then uneducated lay brothers were added to do the heavy manual work. Following the pattern of Cistercians, the "choir women" were also joined by lay sisters who did a lot of the manual work. During his long life, (Gilbert was over 90 when he died) this combination of men and women living at opposite sides of the main church gained popularity and so many other houses were formed. The Gilbertines, as they were known was the only purely English monastic order. It never grew rich as the emphasis was always on prayer and service to the local community. Like all religious houses, they were all suppressed by Henry VIII.



How can we be inspired by St Gilbert? He was a parish priest who wanted people in his parish community to draw closer to Jesus. We may not find a religious order in our community, but are there other ways in which we can increase the prayer life of our parish. Maybe we can start or join a prayer group. How about a prayer and activity group for children?

Malton Priory today, one of the few houses that was established outside of Lincolnshire. Photo © Carol Ann Harnett 2021

5th February, St. Agatha

St. Agatha is another one of the early Christian saints who were important enough in the early Christian Church to be remembered in the Roman Canon (now Eucharistic Prayer I) but of whom known facts are far and few between. The only known fact is that she was martyred in Sicily, probably during the persecution of Decius (250-253). However, for her reputation to have spread to Rome and to be remembered at Mass, she must have been quite a remarkable woman. In fact, "Agatha" comes from the Greek word for "good" and it could be that she was an exceptionally good woman.

Today might be a great day to celebrate all that is good in the world and give God thanks for His wonderful goodness.

8th February, St. Josephine St Josephine Bakhita (1869 - 1947)

Josephine Bakhita was born near Jebel Agilere in South Darfur in what is now Sudan. She was kidnapped when still a young child, and was sold as a slave. The life of a slave was hard, and Josephine had to work very long hours with little food and no comfort. Again and again, she was sold to different families and was treated very cruelly. One day a Christian family from Italy rescued her by buying her, and took her to Italy with them. They treated her very well as if she was a member of their family, and she joined in with their family prayers, and went to Mass with them. Eventually she heard God calling her to become a religious sister and joined the Canossian Daughters of Charity. She spent the rest of her life living at Schio, a small village near Vicenza, serving the poor with a great deal of devotion and prayer. She died on 8 February, 1947.



St. Josephine Bakhita is an example of someone who came to know Jesus through the example of Christian living. The family that rescued her not only saved her life and gave her a chance to grow up free from slavery, but by their practice of the faith Josephine was able to come to know Jesus and hear Him call her to serve the poor.

We must never be afraid of practicing our faith, even if we have visitors who are not Christian in our home. We never know how God is going to use our witness for His glory.

St. Josephine Bakhita, pray for us that we may courageously live our Christian faith even when those around us do not know you. Amen.

8th February, St. Cuthman of Steyning

St. Cuthman was a shepherd who cared for his crippled mother after his father died. Unfortunately, he fell on hard times, so Cuthman had to beg for money. Setting out from his home in Chilham near Bosham in West Sussex, he begged for money, pulling his crippled mother in a wooden cart which he had rigged up with ropes. Suddenly, the ropes broke, so Cuthman made some ropes from twisted willow stems. As he created his new ropes he prayed, "Father, when these ropes fail, I will stop there and build you a church." Along the South coast he went, pulling his mother in the wooden cart, stopping only to beg and rest for the night. Eventually he reached a village called Steyning and there the makeshift ropes finally gave way. So Cuthman knelt and prayed, "Father, Almighty, you have brought my wanderings to an end, enable me to begin this work. You have given me the desire to be a builder, so please make up for my lack of skill."

After building a simple hut for his mother to live in he set about building a church out of wood, for the local people. Cuthman's prayer was answered as the locals helped him, teaching him important skills needed to build a safe and strong church. It was nearly finished but there was a difficult roof beam to fix. Nobody was to be seen as Cuthman, struggling alone with the heavy beam, prayed for assistance this one last time. Then a stranger appeared and helped him. When they finished, he asked the stranger His name, but He replied "I am He in whose name you are building this church." With the church completed, Cuthman returned to being a shepherd and spent his days in prayer whilst out in the fields. St. Cuthman was venerated as a saint well before the Norman Conquest. His dates are uncertain, but some sources suggest that St. Wilfrid baptised him as a baby. King Ethelwulf, father of King Alfred, was buried in the church. It's now a fine stone building, dedicated to St. Andrew and St. Cuthbert. It is of course an Anglican church now but is well worth a visit if you are near there.

Next time you are in your church building, give thanks for all those who have designed, built and who maintain it.

10th February, St. Scholastica

St. Scholastica was the sister, probably the twin, of St. Benedict, founder of the Benedictines. As a child she consecrated herself to Jesus, promising to spend the rest of her life serving Him. It is not known exactly when but eventually, Scholastica set up a community of women who followed her brother's Benedictine rule, at Plombariola, which was about five miles away from Monte Cassino, the great foundation of St. Benedict himself.

Brother and sister kept in contact with each other and once a year they used to meet (on their birthday, possibly) at a mutually convenient house as men and women were not permitted to enter each other's convents. On the last time that they met, Scholastica knew that she was nearing the end of her life, and asked her brother to stay an extra day, but he refused, saying that he did not want to spend the night away from his monastery. So Scholastica bent her head down upon her hands which were on the table and prayed that God would keep her brother with her. Immediately a sudden storm blew up with wind howling and rain lashing down so hard, that Benedict could no go out into it. He exclaimed, "God forgive you Sister! What have you done?" She looked up at him and smiled.

"I asked a favour of you," she said, "but you refused. So, I asked God instead and He answered my plea."

Benedict was forced to stay, and they spent the night talking about Jesus and the wonders of His salvation. In the morning, the storm abated, and Benedict left to return to his monastery. The twins never saw each other again on earth, as Scholastica died three days later.

Families are important. Maybe today would be a good idea to get in touch with a family member you have not seen for a while. Children could possibly write a letter to a relative telling them about what they have been doing at school.

11th February, Our Lady of Lourdes



In 1858 a poor illiterate young girl called Bernadette Soubirous was gathering sticks near a cavern called "de Massabielle" when she saw a beautiful woman who said that she was "The Immaculate Conception." This is one of the titles that the Church has given to Our Lady and it means that SHE (Mary) was conceived without sin. (It is not about the way Jesus was conceived in her womb).

At the spot where Mary appeared a stream began to flow, and many people have been healed physically and spiritually by bathing in these waters.

Many dioceses organise pilgrimages to Lourdes. Maybe you have been on one? Whether or not you have, today you can say a special prayer for those who are sick, asking Mary, our Blessed Mother to comfort and heal them.

Ever Immaculate Virgin Mother of Mercy, Health of the sick, refuge of sinners, Comforter of the afflicted, you know my wants, my troubles, my sufferings; look with mercy on me. Amen.

14th February, Sts. Cyril (827-869) and Methodius (826-885)

Sts. Cyril and Methodius were declared Patrons of Europe by Pope St John Paul II because they worked so hard to take the Gospel to the Eastern European countries. They were brothers who born in Thessalonica in Greece (The same place that St Paul wrote to in his letters to the Thessalonians), and both became priests. They went to Moravia, Bohemia and Bulgaria to tell people the Good News of Jesus and when there were there, they translated liturgical texts (Mass) into the Slavonic language, inventing the Cyrillic alphabet which many of our Eastern European friends are familiar with. After Cyril's death Methodius became Bishop of Pannonia in Hungary, where he continued to evangelise. Because he was firm in his beliefs, some people got jealous and attacked him for his faith. However, he was always supported by the Pope.

If you can speak other languages, translate these phrases from the Bible into as many languages as you can: Send me any of your translations to include another time!

"My Soul Magnifies the Lord" (Lk. 1:46)

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19).

"I am the Bread of Life" (Jn. 6:35).

14th February St. Valentine (C.269)

There are more legends that facts, surrounding St. Valentine. What we do know is that he was priest living in Rome who was martyred because he refused to stop worshipping Jesus. The emperor Claudius II had declared that everyone should worship him, but Valentine said that we must only worship God. Some stories say that Valentine had tried to be friends with Claudius and had tried to teach him about Jesus. He had told the emperor that Jesus Christ loves Him and that he would lose nothing and gain everything by becoming a Christian. However, Claudius was too frightened to accept Jesus and instead put Valentine in prison. When in prison, he wrote letters to the emperor's daughter telling her about Jesus and ended with "from your Valentine." It was not a romantic letter though!

Valentine was let out of prison, and he thought that he would be free to carry on telling people about Jesus Christ, but on 14th February, he was set upon and was beaten with clubs and stones, before being beheaded outside the Flaminian Gate in Rome. He was buried at a Christian cemetery on the Via Flaminia.

Why has his feast day become associated with romantic love? In Rome at that time, the Romans used to spend three days celebrating Romanic love and it was a coincidence that Valentine was martyred during the middle of these celebrations.

St. Valentine is also patron saint of bee-keepers and epileptics as well as of lovers.

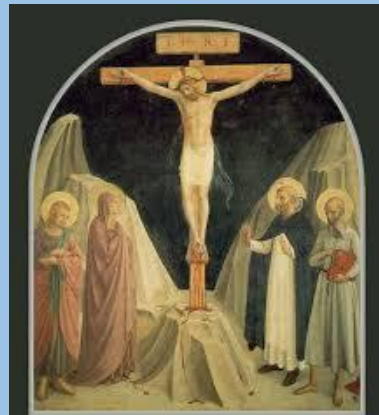
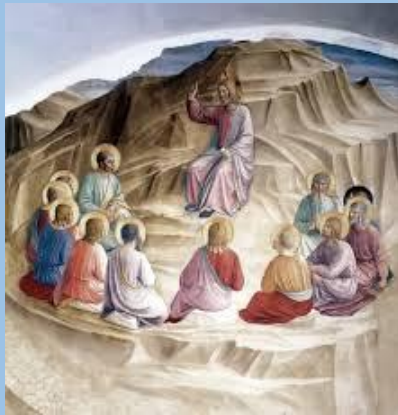
Spend a few moments praying for these groups of people, especially for those who are married and those who are preparing to get married.

18th February: Blessed John of Fiesole/Better known as Fra Angelico

This amazing painter was a Dominican friar from Florence in Italy.

Dominicans are officially known as the "Order of Preachers" which means that their job is to tell people about

Jesus Christ. Blessed Fra Angelico did not use words, but he used paintings to speak about Jesus. Notice that in a lot of them we can see some monks (Dominicans) in black cloaks in the picture. They are there to remind us that the pictures are not decorations but are to reflect and pray about. When we look at art, we are not worshipping the image, but the picture helps us to talk to Jesus/Our Lady etc. A bit like we might talk to a photo of someone who has died. Here are some of his most famous pictures. How about cutting these out and putting them in chronological order? Please send us a photo of your version to share.



21st February St. Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

St. Robert Southwell was born in Norfolk but grew up in West Sussex near Horsham, so his memorial is celebrated in these two counties. His was a staunch Catholic family in a time when it was illegal to be a Catholic. He knew from a very young age that he wanted to be a priest and at the age of 15 left home to study in Paris and then at the English seminary at Douai in France. However, he was determined to be a Jesuit, so that he could go back to England to support the Catholic families who were secretly celebrating Mass in their homes. So, aged 17, he walked to Rome to train for this dangerous job and was ordained priest when he was 23 years old.

Two years later, in 1586 he was permitted to return to England and with Fr. Henry Garnet, began to support both the Jesuit priests and the Catholic families in England. Their arrival had been noted by the queen's spies, but he and Fr. Garnet were able to outwit the authorities, travelling in disguise and adopting other names, such as "Mr Cotton" for a while. They were able to go from safe house to safe house celebrating Mass, baptising, hearing confessions and anointing the sick. All this time he organised a lot of the other Jesuit priests travelling around the country, also in disguise. (We know a lot about his travels because another Jesuit, John Gerard survived and wrote an account of his time in England in a wonderful book called "The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest".)

Eventually he settled in London for most of the time where he was chaplain to Anne Howards, wife of (St.) Philip Howards who was in the Tower of London because he was a Catholic. (The family is related to Katharine Howard, the 5th wife of Henry VIII). St. Robert wrote lots of letters to people to support them, including many letters to St. Philip Howard and poems that were secretly published as pamphlets.

In 1592, after St. Robert had spent six years in England, Topcliffe, the hated priest-hunter was hard on his heels. John Gerard described Topcliffe as "old and hoary and a veteran in evil". Topcliffe pressurised a young Catholic girl, Anne Bellamy, to betray St. Robert. She invited him to her house in Harrow and told Topcliffe that he was coming. Topcliffe was delighted and arrested St. Robert at once, taking him to his own house where he tortured him for four days. However, St. Robert refused to give out the names of any Catholics or their addresses, so he was sent to the Tower and was kept in dirty squalid conditions for two and a half years without trial. Eventually in 1595 he was tried as a traitor and sent to Tyburn on 21st February to be hung, drawn and quartered, the usual treatment for Catholics who refused to give up their faith. Just before his death he prayed for Queen Elizabeth (1st) and for his country, England. He was 33 years old.

St. Robert's poetry is written in a language that is not easy to read these days (like Shakespeare) but is nevertheless beautiful. Here are a couple of lines from one poem, "My child, my choice" which is about the infant Christ, whose love blesses all.

*I praise Him most, I love Him best, all praise and love is His;
While Him I love, in Him I live, and cannot live amiss.
Love's sweetest mark, laud's highest theme, man's most desired light,
To love Him life, to leave Him death, to live in Him delight.*

Why don't you write a poem about Jesus Christ? Send your poems to the email on the front page for inclusion in future editions.

For more about St. Robert Southwell's poetry see <https://mypoeticside.com/show-classic-poem-27940>

22nd February, St. Peter's Chair

Today's feast reminds us that the Church is built on the Apostles. Jesus chose 12 men to go out and take the Good News of salvation to the whole world. The head or spokesperson of the Apostles was St. Peter and right from the beginning of the Church, the Bishop of Rome was recognised as the father on earth of the Church. ("pope" comes from "papa" meaning "father").



Today is a day to give thanks that the faith Jesus gave to His Apostles, is the same faith that we now have. What Jesus taught, the Apostles passed on, and what was heard by their hearers, has been handed on for 2,000 years. The whole mission of the Church, before anything else, is to pass on the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Maybe you can say this prayer today or write one of your own.

Collect from Mass today

Let us pray.

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that no tempests may disturb us,
for you have set us fast
on the rock of the Apostle Peter's confession of faith.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

23rd February St. Polycarp (-155)

In the previous box we saw about how the faith was passed on from the Apostles to the early Church and from them to us. St. Polycarp is an example of that happening as he was taught by St. Ignatius of Antioch, who had been taught by St. John the Apostle. In fact, some people think that St. John lived for so long that he knew Polycarp as a very small child, but we don't know for sure. Anyway, St. Polycarp became bishop of Smyrna in what is now Turkey. The Romans did not like the Christians because they would not worship the emperor, which of course the Christians refused to do as only God can be worshipped. When St. Polycarp was arrested, he was an old man of about 84 years (which was VERY old for those days). Before being condemned to be burned to death, the Roman who was trying him said, "come on, you are an old man, surely you want to live the rest of your life in comfort?" but Polycarp replied, "My Lord Jesus has been a friend of mine for eighty-four years and I am not going to give up on Him now!

Martyrs like him, and St. Valentine and St. Robert Southwell (above), have inspired the Church from the very beginning to be strong in her faith against those who would rather that we conformed to the world around, which is always a temptation!

*Think of all the older people you know who have taught you about Jesus, teachers, parents, grandparents, priests, friends.
Say a prayer for them that they will keep strong in their faith in difficult times.*

28th February St. Oswald of Worcester (925-992)

Not to be confused with St. Oswald, King of Northumbria in the seventh century, this St. Oswald was a bishop and archbishop. He was educated by the Benedictines in France but on returning to England was consecrated as bishop of Worcester. Oswald founded a number of Benedictine monasteries in the midlands, including Pershore Abbey. He also brought monks to Worcester Cathedral so that it ran like an abbey, even though it was a secular cathedral. (It was from here that monks set out to establish the abbey at Great Malvern). In 972 Oswald was also made archbishop of York, but he also remained archbishop of Worcester, dying at Worcester on 28th February 992.

St. Oswald was not just a good organiser, he also loved celebrating the liturgy with great devotion and reverence, recognising that as a priest, this was his particular privilege. He also had a special love for the poor and in Lent would wash the feet of twelve poor men every day (not just on Maundy Thursday). Oswald worked hard to re-establish monasteries after the turmoil of the Danish invasions and by doing this he not only spread his practice of good liturgy, but also helped the poor.

Monasteries before the Reformation were important places in society. They served as schools, hospitals and as places for travellers to stay. The poor and destitute often sought help from monasteries and they provided work for many in society as lay brothers and sisters. When the monasteries were closed by King Henry VIII, many were left to fall to pieces, or their stones were used in other buildings, but some such as Malvern Priory and Pershore, became the parish church.

How can we be inspired by St. Oswald?

- Maybe visit somewhere that used to be a monastery or abbey and imagine what it was like for the monks who lived and worshipped there?
- Can we give something to the poor? As it is Lent and St. Oswald took particular care of the poor during Lent.
- How about reading through the prayers at Mass and think about what they actually mean?
- Pay particular attention at Mass during the Eucharistic Prayer, especially the moment of consecration.
- Pray for your priest that he can continue to love the sacraments and celebrate Mass with dignity as St. Oswald did.

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