

## **First Sunday after Christmas 2023 Luke 2:22-40. Simeon and Anna**

The light has come into the world. And today's beautiful gospel shows us wonderful ways of how to live this life of light, modelled in a young mum, a dying man, and an old widow. Witnesses to hearts that have been fully given to God.

I also love it because its about a pair of senior citz.

The tale of Simeon and Anna is a tale of grace. Anna's name means "grace", a reminder that the gospel is a story of God's free gift of himself to us, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Simeon and Anna are recognized and graced by God. That's why the aged Simeon, over a long period of waiting and from all the many children brought to the temple, recognized God's salvation in Christ.

Simeon and Anna waited for years for the coming of the Messiah. In Simeon's case, the centre of his joy was the privilege of being God's servant, and in return, God let him see the salvation of the world as it dawned.

Simeon saw the baby Jesus as the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people through the law and the prophets. God promised Moses that a prophet would come who would be unlike any other prophet.

God promised David a son who would reign forever. God told Isaiah that a son would be born of a virgin, and he would be called Emmanuel - God with us.

The Prophet Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Anna was an eighty-four-year-old widow who stayed close to the temple and served God through fasting and praying. God blessed her by allowing her to see the Saviour of the world as a tiny newborn, and she "began to praise God and speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (v.38).

God fulfilled the promise he made to Simeon that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. When God fulfilled that promise, Simeon uttered the words that can be part of the funeral liturgy in the Anglican Church - "O Lord, you let your servant go in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation, which has been since the world began".

The world has never been without people like Anna and Simeon. People with a forward look in whom there burned a great hope, a people on tiptoe, looking out.

Living in hope and expectation that a great day was coming when wrong would be righted, when justice would be done, when God would reveal his arm and bring salvation to humankind.

One night over two thousand years ago, the Word became flesh in a baby born in Bethlehem. One day, it will become flesh again when Christ returns to set up his kingdom here on earth.

Simeon also told Mary of the suffering and death Jesus would have to endure for all of his people, and his people are not just Jews.

Simeon say that this light that has come into the world will be a "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (v.32).

Most Jews thought of the redemption of Jerusalem and God's people in terms of freedom from Roman rule, but some, like Anna and Simeon had a vision of the great spiritual renewal of the coming of the light.

God's salvation doesn't mean that we will never suffer troubles, illness, rejection, or death. It happened to Jesus. It happened to Mary. It will happen to us, but if we endure hardships with faith, we become increasingly blessed.

This is one of the great mysteries of our faith.

It takes faith to know a blessing from God. It is the joy of celebrating God's goodness in the midst of our chaotic, suffering world.

As life inexorably passes, how do we mature in the same way that Simeon and Anna did; to end well as Simeon did?

Well, perhaps just by the sort of persevering and persistent service to God offered by Anna and Simeon. Theirs was not physically taxing service and we will never be too old, weak, or sick, to make a difference though our prayers and encouragement.

Our attitude and behaviour will make a difference. Like Anna, God will guide us to share the story of Jesus with everyone we meet.

We have also been told of the coming Christ. Like Simeon and Anna, we are heirs of a promise. We are prompted by the same Spirit. We long to see the same face.

To do so successfully, we must wait forwardly, patiently, and be vigilant.

When thinking about this sermon, I thought perhaps that when we too look at Jesus' face, we will know that it is time for us to come home to our heavenly Father, just like Simeon knew it was time for him to go when he saw the face of the baby Jesus.

We have just come through the season of preparation for the coming of Christ and are now in the midst of Christmas. We, like Simeon and Anna, have been waiting and preparing for the coming of the Messiah. God works in a time zone where a day is as a thousand years.

Simeon and Anna walked a very long road of faith indeed. They remained on the narrow way and never wavered in persistence or expectation, and they received the reward of Joy, which can only come through Christ Jesus.

When our dreams don't come true in a day, we, like Simeon and Anna, need to keep in mind that God is still at work. He is still wrapping the package. He is still preparing the gift to fit our needs.

We need to pray, not just for the gift, but also for patience to wait for God's unveiling, just as Simeon and Anna had to.

And as we practice faith, hope, attentiveness to the presence of God, submission, and patience, we see the Christ child.

The moment we believe, Like Simeon, our eyes see God's salvation. When we break open the word of God and enjoy the benefits of baptism and holy communion, we experience the joy of seeing a glimpse of the face of Jesus.

We see the agony of his body broken for us on the cross. We hold it to us, that which was poured out for us, for the forgiveness of sins, from all that separates us from God. "Now Lord, you let your servant go in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation." Let me pray ...