

Luke 2:22-33, 36-38

²² When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (²³ It's written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.") ²⁴ They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, *A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*^[a]

Simeon's response to Jesus

²⁵ A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. ²⁸ Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said,

²⁹ "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, ³⁰ because my eyes have seen your salvation.

³¹ You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples.

³² It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

³³ His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him.

Anna's response to Jesus

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. ³⁷ She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

This is the word of God for us the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Love is here!

When I was a kid my parents never shied away from taking all of us kids to nice restaurants every now and then. We kids must have been so horrible. Because I remember the feeling of waiting -- kind of an unsettled, anxious feeling. What a struggle it was to wait and wait and wait for our food for what seemed like hours. But my Dad always said, "Good things take time." "Good things take time." And those adventures took on a whole new meaning for me after I had my own kids. And I'm afraid all that waiting mentally scarred me, because I was only brave enough to take my kids to places like McDonalds.

Anna and Simeon are the poster children for my Dad's mantra, "Good things take time." They are the poster children for faith and patience because they had both been waiting almost their entire lives for the Messiah to appear.

So, here's how it goes with Anna and Simeon. Jesus is still a baby, and Mary and Joseph have come to the temple in Jerusalem for the ritual cleansing. Under Jewish law, following the birth of a child, a woman was ritually unclean for a period of time – 40 days if the woman gave birth to a son and 80 days if the woman gave birth to a daughter. Childbearing wasn't a sin, but it made the woman impure and it required an offering – an animal sacrifice. And so that is why Mary and Joseph arrive in Jerusalem to offer the animal sacrifice that poor people offer, a pair of birds. So we are reminded that Jesus was born into a poor family--not a royal one. But we also see that Jesus was born into a family that observed the religious laws of their faith.

The family came to Jerusalem to present Jesus to God. According to the law, every firstborn male belonged to God – both human beings and animals – and were therefore sacred. And so the parents participated in a ceremony of the redemption of the firstborn – where the parents paid a sum to the priests to redeem their son, to buy back their son from God so to speak. (In the same way that the sacrifice of Jesus's life will redeem all of humanity,) And even though Jesus is only a few days old in this scripture, the amazing thing is that there have already been several people who have recognized that there is something special about this baby. When Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth, her baby John, leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and called out to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Elizabeth's husband Zechariah, prophesied that in this baby God "has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."

The angels and the shepherds have recognized the newborn king. And the wise men will come soon, too.

In today's scripture, we see two more people who recognize the infant Jesus as the Messiah. The prophets Anna and Simeon have been patiently awaiting the arrival of the Messiah, and on this day their waiting has finally paid off.

The scripture tells us that Simeon was righteous and devout. Righteous meaning he was careful to obey the commandments, and devout meaning he tried to live a God-focused life. And we hear that the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon and revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And so, led by the Spirit of God, he went into the temple area.

The temple in Jerusalem was a huge place with covered porches surrounding open courtyards the size of several football fields. And the spirit led Simeon to just the right spot to meet Mary and Joseph. And when Simeon spots the family, he must immediately sense that God's promise has been fulfilled because he takes the baby in his arms and he praises God, saying to God:

²⁹"Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, ³⁰because my eyes have seen your salvation.

³¹ You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples.

³² It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

God fulfilled his promise to Simeon. Because he allowed himself to be led by the Spirit, he had found the promised Christ. Surely, over the years, Simeon has prayed a thousand prayers and hoped a thousand hopes and even suffered a thousand disappointments. And finally, his dream is realized, and he can die in peace. God has rewarded his waiting. Good things take time. And Simeon rejoices.

And then Anna enters the picture. She was a prophet, and she was very old. I would love to know more about Anna. All we do know is that after she married, she lived with her husband for only seven years. The scripture says:

³⁷ She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

She had been a widow for a long time – she had lived with her husband for only seven years, and she was now 84. But she never gave up on God. She never became bitter in her grief, and she was still serving God after all those years. How did she do it? I wonder if her lifestyle is why she remained faithful and joyful – she fasted -- she worshiped without ceasing -- she prayed without ceasing. She not only worshiped publicly, but she had a private relationship with God through fasting and prayer. And I can't imagine that a person who worships and prays without ceasing could ever become a bitter person. I can't imagine a person who devotes her whole life to praising God being anything other than overflowing with joy and hope. I wonder if Anna even worshiped God on days she really didn't feel like it – days when she would have rather stayed home in bed – she would have certainly had justification for some self-pity, maybe even a lot of self-pity -- because widows of her day lived a difficult and dangerous life.

But through it all Anna worshiped. Anna was faithful and hopeful and Anna waited. Good things take time. And Anna now rejoices.

When she sees the baby, she immediately begins to praise God and tell others about Jesus.

Anna and Simeon both recognized who this baby really was. Both had waited with patience and hope and faithfulness over many years.

We have a lot to learn from the lives of Anna and Simeon. We are a busy and impatient people, aren't we? We are like little kids squirming as they wait for their food at a fancy restaurant. We want what we want, and we want it now. We are accustomed to instant gratification, and hate to wait in general. During 2020, we have been sorely tested in this area. We have been forced into a time of extended waiting with the worst being the uncertainty of its duration. We are waiting to see our families again, waiting to hug people again, waiting to get back to church, waiting for a vaccine. Waiting has become a whole new way of life that we are NOT at all comfortable with. This year has been defined by waiting, and next year may be, too.

But imagine waiting your whole life! It's hard to comprehend waiting our entire lives for God to work. We can't imagine being at the temple constantly. We can't picture a life where we never cease worshiping and praying and praising God.

You've probably noticed it, but God works in a time frame that's not like ours – in God's world a day is like a thousand years. When our dreams don't come true in a day, when we think our prayers aren't answered, we need to remember that God is still at work. If I can use a Christmas metaphor, during periods of waiting for God it's as if God is still wrapping a package – still preparing the gift to fit our needs. And not only that, God is still preparing **us** to receive the gift that God has in mind. The gift God has for us may be different than what we expected, but I must believe that the gift God has for us is so much more than what we could have ever dreamed or imagined ourselves.

I pray for us today that as we wait, we might use this time wisely. May we open our eyes to the gift that Anna and Simeon had to wait many years for! Because we don't have to wait for the most important thing --- the gift of the Lord's Christ has **already** been set before us! The gift

of a **relationship** with our God through the Lord's Christ is free to us all – right now! The gift of the **love** of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is free to us all – right now -- no strings attached. That love doesn't end when Christmas is over -- it is still here. We only have to say, "yes" to God to accept. God presents his love to us on a silver platter – and God yearns for us to take it!

And friends, even after we have accepted the gift of God's love, this gift becomes better and better as we become more faithful followers of Jesus – it's a gift that grows as we grow. Whether we are young or old, we can and we must continue to grow closer to Christ with each day of our lives. It seems that good things really do take time. So hang in there. Don't give up.

May we pray, not just to receive this gift, but also for the patience and the faithfulness and the hope to wait for God's unveiling of that gift in our lives and in the lives of our family and friends. Let's rejoice and praise God. Not only when we receive the many good gifts that God pours out on us, but as we wait, too.

Let us pray.

Holy and living God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus – the gift who was recognized and worshiped by prophets of old beginning before he was even born. And we come today to do the same – to rejoice in the birth of the salvation of the world -- and to open our eyes to the light who brings **us** revelation – the light who reveals to **us** who you are, God. And so may we be patient and faithful. May we learn to seek your Holy Spirit and to walk with your Holy Spirit. May we learn to worship you without ceasing and to pray without ceasing. May we say "yes" to living for you and not for ourselves. May we continue to grow as your disciples especially in this time of waiting. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Simeon's Moment by Ron DiCianni



Anna in the Temple, by Jerry Bacik