

Standing on the Edge of Time

Luke 2: 22-40

The Seventh Day of Christmas

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We hope that the older we get, the more we resemble Simeon and Anna, two faithful old people with great memories and deep hope. Memories help us see the future. What Christmas memories do you have of being at church this week in past years?

Three Christmas worship memories always stick in my mind. There was my first pageant, when four-year-old me wore patent leather shoes and said, “M is for Mary his mother so mild,” as I held the M card to spell out Christmas in the 1960’s Christmas pageant. Our small-town church had nine four-year olds who could all say a line to spell Christmas. It was one of the first times my “not-from-there” mother felt welcome in my first church.

Time passed; When our second born son was born in mid-November, he was just the right age to play Baby Jesus on Christmas Eve. For the first time in my life, I was cast as Mary! John was Joseph, and for a moment our deacon considered casting our first-born son as Joseph’s young donkey. Our little “Jesus” slept through the entire production. That was the only Christmas pageant I remember that included Simeon and Anna in the cast.

More time passed. This year I rejoice that over 200 people came to worship at our services last weekend; some were among the 100+ who gathered to enjoy Christmas dinner here in Fellowship Hall.

Sometime between playing Mary with my second born child as the sleeping Jesus and rejoicing that 43 people wanted to gather and sing Christmas carols on Christmas Day in the morning, I fell in love with this Jesus’ story where he was blessed by Simeon and Anna. When Christmas falls Tuesday through Saturday, we do not always take time to tell it again. Still, sooner or later every faithful Christian hopes to age like Simeon and Anna aged.

We do not need to guess how old Anna was, Luke told us she was 84, and quick Google research claimed the average life expectancy then was 35. That explains why her age was so impressive that Luke told us! But this year as so many of us live another ten years beyond 84, we would think of her as the same age and energy as Lily Tomlin.ⁱ

We are allowed a bit more imagination with Simeon. In the past, when I have dug into what we know about Simeon, he seems to have been a mature man in a time and place when the average life expectancy was 35 years.ⁱⁱ Simeon thought himself as nearing death, so maybe we can imagine him as 44, the same age as *The Voice* coach, John Legend.ⁱⁱⁱ

Simeon and Anna clearly weren't a couple, but they were both faithful to the ministry at the Temple and there daily. They must have known each other. So, it wasn't surprising that they were there when Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus arrived for their post birth rituals with the sacrifice required by a poor young couple, two turtledoves. Now which two young rising performers could we cast as Mary and Joseph? They were so young! But Jesus was younger. Remember, every baby could play the part of Jesus.

More importantly, who would we cast you as in this story? Would you be Simeon, Anna, Joseph, Mary, or the narrator? After all, if you are old enough to read this manuscript, you are too old to play the role of Baby Jesus! Not only that, but the role of Christ has already been filled, so who are we among the great cast that again performs his life story so that it is never forgotten, but always embodied in our biographies as well.

I would opt for Anna. Yes, I am a bit young for the role, but I will grow into it. Worshipping with prayer and fasting is not a bad life; I am already on my way. While she told the story to everyone she could, she is not quoted. Is it because her words were so ordinary, so simple? Or was it so those of us called to continue her announcing the good new of Jesus can fill in with our words appropriate for those who will hear Christ's good news from each of us.

Who would you opt for? And why?

As I look at the church as it is today, I see many, many people who could be cast as either Simeon or Anna. Or perhaps you have another favorite Jesus story where you can imagine yourself the other person, say Zaccheus, the short man who climbed a tree. Remember how Jesus invited himself to Zaccheus' house for lunch? Or Lazarus who was restored to life? Have you felt yourself hoping out of a death

sentence with a word from Jesus? Maybe you see yourself as Martha, whose love for people showed in her willingness to host them. We have so many stories of people who knew Jesus. Which one is a mirror for your life with Christ? Do you sometimes feel as if you are simply one in the crowd of 5000 that Jesus fed with a boy's lunch?

All those people who are in Jesus' biographies, the named and the unnamed, had one thing in common; they all stood on the edge of time.

Simeon was acutely aware of standing on the edge of time as he praised God. Imagine him singing, "Now, master, let your servant go in peace . . . because my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2: 29-30, Common English Bible). Anna seemed similarly aware of God's promise for humanity's salvation. They were at the great Temple in Jerusalem daily, always hoping for God's promised messiah, King David's greater son. Simeon and Anna both recognized him in a baby boy about to be circumcised. (Luke 2:27) They probably saw other families like Joseph, Mary, and Jesus often; but in this family both recognized God's promised salvation was about to be fulfilled. We may wonder how they knew they stood when what was moved out of sight and what would be came into clear view. But part of the answer is simply that they showed up where it was most likely to happen.

Were Simeon and Anna the only two people in the Temple that day? Luke is silent, but we strongly suspect there were other widows like Anna, devout men like Simeon, young parents like Joseph and Mary, and several priests as well. Were Simeon and Anna the only two who recognized the Christ in swaddling clothes? Who knows! Perhaps Luke selected their meeting Jesus as just two testimonies of the many people who welcomed this baby Son of God. Most likely there were also those who saw only another poor young family, not their Savior and his parents. (Mary birthed him and Joseph adopted him.)

We too stand on the edge of time, but are we aware of it? Sometimes for a moment we have a glimmer of awareness, but if we are honest, most often we are not aware. We are busy people with chores to get done and places to go. But sooner or later we will slow down and realize the horizon between mortality and immortality is closer than the horizon of our birth. Then we pay attention. We take notice. Our prayer life grows, and we want to understand the promise of Christ includes not just myself, but my loved ones as well. We read our Bibles more often, the disciplined reading we struggled with when we were younger becomes as embedded in our day as both sunrise and sunset.

This year, 2023, is about to end. Soon it will be 2024. Will Christ come again? Yes. But will it be the end of time? Perhaps, but only Christ knows for sure. But we can be sure that between now and his arrival, he wants us on the lookout for his coming—just like Simeon and Anna.

Amen.

ⁱ Best known to me answer when I Googled “famous women born in 1939.

ⁱⁱ The first 7 answers to my Google question.

ⁱⁱⁱ First Google answer when I learned assisted living residents enjoy watching *The Voice* and know who he is.