

During the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, we have been examining the various ways the participants have viewed the advent events. We started by looking at the Christmas story through the eyes of Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wisemen, and today's sermon will finish up by looking at the gift of the baby Jesus through the eyes of Simeon and Anna.

As we look at this baby through the eyes of Simeon and Anna, we are also reminded of how our lives are forever changed by his work. We see in Simeon and Anna lives that culminated in being able to see their savior in the form of a 40-day old baby.

During these past Sundays the excitement has built up as we have inched closer to Christmas morning and as we move past Christmas and New Years and look at 2021 in the rear-view mirror, there are still lessons to learn.

This morning's scripture from Luke recalls what happens following Jesus' birth. Just before the passage we read this morning, Luke tells us that eight days after Jesus was born, his parents circumcised him and gave him the name Jesus, as instructed by the angel before he was born.

Where we pick up this morning, forty days have passed since Jesus' birth, and his parents are in the Temple for another "first," another rite of passage. In the Jewish faith, on the 40th day after a male child was born, the mother and father in the Jewish faith were to go to the temple in Jerusalem. Because they were in Bethlehem, that was just a trip of five or six miles. So, let's go back to the temple and re-visit what that day would have looked like. We know that Bethlehem is a day's walk from the temple.

Had we been there, what we would have seen would have likely been an impoverished young family, walk up with their young baby, tired but excited. They were doing what the religiously faithful were called to do. Mary and Joseph were following the law and presenting Jesus to the Lord. The irony was that Jesus was already the Lord's and his parents were being obedient in making the trip.

Two things were to take place in this dedication ceremony. The family's firstborn son was to be dedicated to God and an offering was to be made to the priest or the rabbi in

order to redeem that child for themselves. Mary and Joseph were assuming the responsibility for the child, knowing it was God's child and they were entrusted with the privilege of raising this child who had been dedicated to the Lord in a godly home.

Mary and Joseph also brought a sacrifice, an animal die in the place of their sins. And the custom was to bring a lamb, an unblemished lamb. But if the family was poor, as Mary and Joseph were, they could bring two pigeons or two turtle doves. So, what we see in Joseph and Mary's life is devoted Jewish parents fulfilling the law.

Let's take a moment to look at the audience that would have witnessed Mary and Joseph coming to the temple with infant Jesus. From Luke's gospel we know about two of the people: Simeon and Anna. We know both were older people, senior citizens by today's standards. We know they were religious people, old hands with the comings and goings in the temple.

We know Simeon was a devout Jew. Luke describes him as a righteous man. The name Simeon means "God has heard." And we will see today that God did hear Simeon's prayer (and the prayers of many others during this time) and was sending to them the greatest answer to prayer ever seen. Simeon was there that day in the temple because the Holy Spirit had made it clear: today was the day. A lifetime's greatest desire was being realized. What Simeon had prayed for his entire life was coming to pass: before he was going to die, he would come face to face with the Messiah.

The word used here is "the Christ." That is the Greek word for the Jewish or Hebrew term "Messiah."

Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit to the temple at the very time when Joseph and Mary are coming for this dedication and purification ceremony. Simeon knows what an auspicious occasion he is being allowed to witness and he responds by praising God and blessing God for allowing him to be a part of this ritual. At last, Simeon's waiting is over.

Simeon had been told by God that he would not die until Jesus Christ came. There is no explanation as to why he was at the Temple, perhaps he was a priest, but that is not mentioned explicitly. We can guess that Simeon was probably advanced in years, but other than that all that we know for sure about Simeon is what Luke tells us: "he was righteous and devout," and "the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ." We are to conclude Simeon is a regular attendee in the

temple and he has made a request of the Lord - he has asked to be able to see the long-promised Messiah before he dies. We learn that the "Holy Spirit is on him" and that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would be seeing Jesus before dying.

This is quite a promise of God to Simeon! We don't know exactly how old Simeon was here, but tradition says he was 113 years old. Certainly, Simeon was elderly and nearing the final chapter of his life. He had been waiting for God for much of his life, and the long-awaited time is now here. Simeon knows that he will see the Christ before he dies.

The question though is, why would God tell Simeon this? Why did God think it was important that someone be there to see Jesus Christ? Why is it so important for Simeon to spend his whole life waiting, just to see the Messiah? That's incredible, but what's the point?

The point is found in Deuteronomy 19:15. We read there that on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a matter be confirmed. Simeon was one of three witnesses that God used to confirm that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, had come to Israel in the flesh. The shepherds were the first, Simeon is the second, and Anna is the third. But before we look at Anna, Simeon needs to do his witnessing. Witnesses speak what they have seen and heard, and Simeon needs to speak. So, this is what he does in Luke 2:27-35. The wait is over, and God has called upon Simeon to speak, and Simeon, though he has been on the sidelines for so long, steps forward to be a witness.

Apparently, this wasn't just Simeon being in the right place at the right time. He came that day for a special purpose and his greatest wish was fulfilled: he was able to take the infant king into his arms. Imagine how joyous that must have been for Simeon. We are told that Simeon expressed that he now could die in peace. Simeon declared,

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss[d] your servant in peace.  
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel."

In the passage we learn that Joseph and Mary had apparently not gotten used to this kind of thing happening. We are told that they "marveled" at Simeon's words. Simeon went on to continue prophesying about Jesus. In one commentary I read they likened it

to an infant baptism service in a contemporary church being interrupted by senior citizens interjecting information about their predictions for the baby's future. By the end, Simeon finishes his oration by telling Mary that she would also experience pain in Jesus' sacrifice.

The other person that plays a role in this passage is Anna. We are told Anna is an older, widowed woman - a woman of great faith. One commentator described it this way. They wrote, ""She was old and she had never ceased to hope.... never ceased to worship.... never ceased to pray". Anna seemingly is always there at the temple. Luke describes it by saying she "didn't depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and petitions night and day".

Anna would have to do so in the Court of Women, one of the outer precincts of the temple, because the inner precincts are reserved for men. In this instance, "never left the temple" does not necessarily mean that she slept there, but only that she was constant in her worship at the temple.

Both Simeon and Anna both had lived faith-filled, expectant lives. Simeon lived his life "looking forward to the consolation of Israel" (v. 25). Anna worshiped in the temple day and night.

Anna is among only a handful of women in the Bible bearing the title "prophetess." After becoming a widow, Anna dedicated herself wholly to the Lord. She never left the temple in Jerusalem but spent her time solidly looking for God. She spent her time worshiping, fasting, and praying - what an amazing model!

It is possible that Anna was given living quarters at the temple because of her designation as prophetess, or she may have lived close by. What stands out is that her devotion was constant for most of her life, and her devotion was rewarded with an encounter with her Savior. Her many years of sacrifice and service were worth it all when she beheld the Messiah, the One for whom she had waited so long.

So, when Mary and Joseph arrive at the temple with the baby Jesus to satisfy the Old Testament law. They are making their purification offering and presenting Jesus as their firstborn before God when Simeon recognizes Jesus. Simeon cradles the Lord Jesus in his arms and begins praising God. He utters a prophecy concerning Jesus and Mary and

at that moment, Anna enters. She immediately recognizes Jesus as the long-awaited Savior and begins thanking God.

At the moment described in Luke's gospel, Anna steps forward into center stage. Overcome with sublime joy, she begins praising God for what she knows has happened. The Greek word used by Luke suggests recognition, intuition. She 'sees' what others cannot.

Her reaction is immediate and dramatic: she speaks in as loud a voice as she can muster, telling anyone near her about this extraordinary child. Here, in front of their eyes, is the Being who will bring redemption to Israel.

Anna the prophetess is among the first few to bring honor to the kingly babe born in a stable. Good news is meant to be shared, and Anna shares it with everyone who was anticipating the Messiah. The Redeemer had come, the prophecies were being fulfilled, and Anna was blessed to see it happen.

Simeon very prophetically made it clear that Jesus would be the fall and rise of so many. But not only that, like Mary, one day your heart is going to be pierced like a sword piercing it. And when Mary, with a mother's love, was at the cross when Jesus had the spikes nailed into His wrists and the spikes nailed into His feet and the spear thrust into His side, she would remember these words. It would be like a sword in her heart, seeing her son suffering so, but remembering that from the time Jesus entered this world, He came to be her Savior as well.

As we reflect on Simeon's words, we start to grasp the profound nature of Jesus' gift.

Those of us who have received Christ as our Savior and Lord, we know the waiting is over in our life when it comes to realizing that we have received salvation, that we have been forgiven of our sins though we don't deserve it. We have been made right with God though we don't deserve it. We have received the gift of eternal life though we don't deserve it. For those of us who have trusted Christ and received the gift of Christmas, which is Jesus, we know the waiting is over. We don't have to wait for all of this, we've received it.

But there are some people who have not received the gift of Christmas. They do not know what the gift of Jesus is all about. They have not put their faith in Christ as the

one and only hope for salvation from sin and death and hell. They don't know that the gift is freely given and that by putting your faith in Christ, you are setting in motion the only hope for receiving the gift and eternal life and victory over death. Today can be your Simeon moment, when you finally see Jesus and believe.

And if you do, you will instantly know that the waiting is over in your life. The waiting is over of wondering if you can ever get yourself free of this nagging guilt, of this nagging emptiness in your heart. The waiting is over in realizing that you would have found the ultimate meaning and purpose in life, and it comes from knowing Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

Simeon recognizes in verse 29, that his life of waiting for the Messiah was according to the Word of the Lord. He had the Word from God that he would live to see the Messiah, and so now he says he can depart in peace, he can die now, his life is complete.

Are you at that place in your own life? If you discovered that you were going to die tomorrow, would you be ready to go? Would you be able to depart in peace? That is an important question to ask. God can take us at any time, and we all need to be ready to go at any time. This means being at peace with God, and peace with one another all the time. Do you need to confess something to God? Do it today. Do you need to restore a relationship with someone, but you've been putting it off? Don't delay any longer. This is the time to stop procrastinating. The time has come to rejoice and to see with Simeon's and Anna's eyes what a wonderful gift the baby Jesus is for all humanity.

Yes, this baby was born to die. To die for my sin and for your sin. But Jesus does not want anyone to feel sorry for Him. He did not come to get your sympathy. He came to get your faith. He came to get your life. It's okay to shed tears for what Christ did on the cross, but if you do, remember the words of Jesus to some of the women of Jerusalem who were crying about him when he went on the cross. He said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke 23:28).

Jesuses came so that we may have eternal life. Simeon and Anna realized that the moment they saw their savior. I invite each of you to look afresh at the gift of the Messiah, dedicated to the Lord in the temple as a 40-day old baby.

Let us each rejoice!