

# ON THE OTHER SIDE OF CHRISTMAS

## PETERSFIELD EVANGELICAL CHURCH

4 January 2015, David Hillson

Passage: Luke 2:21-40

### INTRODUCTION

Christmas and New Year are both over – how are you feeling? Anti-climax? Sad it's all over? It was fun while it lasted, but now...?

Is there anything to look forward to, now that the excitement of Christmas and New Year is over?

This morning we're going to look at a post-Christmas story from the Bible, the story of Simeon and Anna from Luke 2. We'll find out what these two people were waiting for, and how they reacted when they found it. And we'll see what their experience tells us about how we should live on the other side of Christmas.

### THE CONTEXT

Luke chapters 1-2 are a bridge between the Old and New Testaments, between the two covenants. Luke is explaining to his reader Theophilus how the coming of Jesus was the **hinge of history**. Everything was different after he came.

So the gospel of Luke starts with some OT links, with a priest (Zechariah) going to the temple to offer incense, in line with the established Jewish ritual. But in the middle of this obedience to the law, God breaks in and announces the coming of a messenger who will fulfil the closing words of the OT (compare Luke 1:16-17 with Malachi 4:5-6). And Zechariah's wife Elizabeth becomes pregnant with John the Baptist.

Then the hinge event – Mary becomes pregnant with Jesus in a miraculous conception, and gives birth to him in Bethlehem.

Followed by another link to the OT, with Joseph & Mary fulfilling the requirement of the law – Jesus is circumcised and taken to the temple, where they meet two prophets, Simeon and Anna.

### TIMING

We know exactly when the events of Luke 2:21-40 took place in relation to the birth of Jesus.

The Jewish law defines what new parents need to do when their baby is born, in Leviticus chapter 12 – different things for a boy or a girl.

- If it's a boy, the mother stays in private to recover for 7 days after the birth, and the baby is circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, in line with the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14).
- If it's a girl, then the mother stays in private to recover for two weeks after the birth
- Then there's a period of purification for the mother: 33 more days for a boy, and 66 more days for a girl.
- Then the parents bring the baby to the temple with two offerings – a burnt offering for thanksgiving and a sin offering for cleansing.

So Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem 40 days after he was born, along with two doves or pigeons (the cheapest "budget" option, because they were poor).

And that's when they met Simeon and Anna. These two had several things in common:

- Both Simeon and Anna were waiting in the temple, and had been waiting for a long time.
- Both were waiting for Jesus, though they didn't know his name
  - Simeon was "looking for **the consolation of Israel**", and knew he wouldn't die until he had seen "**the Lord's Christ**" (verses 25-26)
    - consolation = *paraklesis* = coming alongside, comfort (cp Holy Spirit)
  - Anna was a prophetess, worshipping, fasting and praying every day, along with others who were "looking for **the redemption of Jerusalem**" (verse 38)
    - redemption = *lutrosis* = loosening, setting free, paying ransom
- Neither of them knew exactly when God's promise would be fulfilled, but they were ready. Perhaps they knew Malachi 3:1 – "*The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.*"
  - looking for = *prosdechomai* = expecting
- Suddenly, out of the blue, one day he was there! Both Simeon and Anna recognised the baby Jesus as the one they'd been waiting for

But their reactions were a bit different.

SIMEON (Luke 2:25-35)

Simeon looked at Jesus, blessed God, and said "*My eyes have seen your **salvation**.*" (verse 30) The name Jesus in Hebrew is Yeshua, which means "salvation". Zechariah said "I've seen your Jesus!"

He knew that this baby would be "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Israel*" (verse 32). This echoes Isaiah 9:2-7 and Isaiah 60:1-3:

- Isaiah 9 – light to the Gentiles: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*
- Isaiah 60 – glory to Israel: *Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*

All this is wonderful, and true – Simeon was right.

But Simeon also had a very **personal reaction** to seeing Jesus. He'd been told by the Holy Spirit that he wouldn't die until he'd seen the messiah. We don't know how long he'd waited or how he felt as the days turned into weeks, months, years... We don't know how he felt as he waited. Was he filled with faith and patience? Did he get frustrated or despondent? Did he wonder if he'd misheard the Holy Spirit, and got it wrong? Was he tired of waiting and ready to die? Or was he faithful right up to the end, and still excited at the prospect of seeing the messiah? We don't know.

But we do know that when he recognised Jesus as the promised messiah, he said this to God: "*You can now let me **depart in peace**, as you had promised.*" (verse 29)

- Literally "release me in peace", *apoluo* = let me go, set me free (same root word *luo* as redemption *lutrosis*)

For Simeon, seeing Jesus gave him a **deep sense of peace, contentment, fulfilment**. This baby was the one he'd been waiting for all that time. At last he had seen God's promise come true, and he was at peace. He could now stop waiting, relax knowing that God had kept his promise, the messiah had come into the world, that God's salvation would be revealed to the Gentiles, and Israel would be rescued and redeemed.

Wonderful – you can imagine a big sigh of relief and a huge smile on Simeon's face! That's it, no more waiting and wondering, it's actually happened now and I can relax!

#### ANNA (Luke 2:36-38)

What about Anna? She'd had a difficult early life, widowed after only 7 years of marriage, and never remarried. By the time we meet her in this passage, she's now 84. If she got married in her late teens, say 17, she would have been a widow for about 60 years!

And she'd dedicated her life in those six decades to worshipping God in the temple, fasting and praying. It's even possible that she lived in the temple grounds, as she was there "*night and day*" (verse 37). Notice how she reacted to her loss – no bitterness, no resentment or self-pity, but giving herself to serve God and worship him. She also listened to God and told others what she heard him saying – she was a prophetess. It's easy to imagine her as a gracious gentle godly lady who others would enjoy being with.

It seems from verse 38 that Anna arrived on the scene at exactly the same time as Simeon was holding the baby Jesus and praying:

- "*coming up at that very moment*" – suggests immediate (KJV: *coming in that instant*)
- "*she gave thanks to God*" – *anthomologeomai* = continual praising in turn, perhaps she and Simeon were singing and praying together?!

Like Simeon, she too gave thanks to God at the amazing news that the promised messiah had arrived in this new-born baby. But then her reaction was rather different from Simeon's.

- Simeon experienced a deep sense of peace as he saw the fulfilment of God's promise.
- But Anna reacted by **telling everyone about this baby Jesus**, God's promised redeemer, the one who fulfilled all the OT promises and opened salvation to all, including the Gentiles. Anyone who would listen, all those who hoped that God would rescue Jerusalem from Roman occupation, or who wanted to see Israel restored to her original destiny – Anna told them all about Jesus. Verse 38 "*She spoke about him to all*".

You get a sense of Anna's excitement and energy – this is it, the one we've all been waiting for. After 60 years of waiting – worshipping, fasting and praying – Anna knows that God has showed up in person as this baby Jesus, and now things are going to change, nothing will be the same. Now is the moment for God's redemption to begin. You need to know about it – listen, this is amazing good news!!!

## WHAT ABOUT US?

What can we learn from Simeon and Anna as we find ourselves today on the other side of Christmas?

Simeon and Anna were waiting for something, for someone – but we're not! Christmas has come and gone – but Christ has come! The promised messiah arrived as a baby in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, grew up, lived and taught, showed us what Father God was really like, then died to open the way for us to be reconciled to God. And he was raised to life again and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us to be with him.

So we don't have to wait for Jesus like they did. We're on the other side of the coming of Jesus. But do we share the same reaction that Simeon and Anna had when they encountered Jesus?

Simeon found a **deep sense of peace and contentment**. He could relax, knowing that God would make everything right. He could trust his future into God's hands, now that he had met Jesus. Are we still worrying about our future, anxious about how things might develop for us? Or are we experiencing deep inner peace, secure in trusting God for our future, filled with hope because Jesus has come?

- Like Simeon, let's be filled with peace and contentment, knowing that God has sent Jesus for us. Let's allow that peace to release us and set us free from worry and anxiety, as we face the future that God has prepared for us.

Anna was also **thankful that Jesus had come**, but she didn't keep the news to herself – **she told everyone about Jesus!** How about us? We know that God's rescue plan is underway, we know who Jesus really is and why he came – will we tell others?

- Like Anna, let's be thankful that Jesus has come, and tell others about him. This good news is too good to keep to ourselves.

As we stand today on the other side of Christmas, let's be like Simeon and Anna.

## PRAYER