

Reflection - The Presentation of Christ in the Temple
02-02-2025
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Malachi 3: 1-4 The Messenger is coming,
 He will come like a refiner and purifier of silver
- Psalm 24 The Lord is the creator of all
 Those who seek the Lord will stand in his holy place
- Hebrews 2: 14-18 Jesus came as a human being to atone for the sins of all
 As he was tested, he is able to help those being tested
- Luke 2: 22-40 Jesus is Presented in the Temple
 Simeon and Anna acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah

Introduction

In the Calendar of the Anglican Church, the 2nd of February is the Holy Day set aside to remember “The Presentation of Christ in the Temple”.

We remember this day, not for anything Jesus did, as he was only an infant, but for what it signifies about who Jesus is, with the prophecies from Simeon and Anna, about who Jesus was to become.

Today I would like to take us through the reactions and statements of both Simeon and Anna as they encountered Jesus in the Temple, and look at what we might take from their lives to help us as followers of Jesus today.

The Scene

Firstly, let's get a bit of an overview of the scene before us in today's gospel.

Joseph and Mary were being good Jewish citizens. They were following the Law of Moses and what was expected of them before God. Jesus being their firstborn son, was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem so they could complete a custom known as the “Redemption of the firstborn”. The Jews, like us today, believed that it is God alone who has the power to give life. Through this offering of a sacrifice before God, they were acknowledging the child belonged to God and they were in effect “redeeming” the child from God through the offering.

The temple would not have been anything like the Church we are in today. In the story we hear today, it wouldn't have just been Jesus who was being brought to the temple, but every firstborn son. In this regard Joseph and Mary and Jesus were no different to other families coming to the temple. I can imagine with all the people and livestock for sacrifices it would have been a noisy, busy place, full of people, sights and smells.

But amidst this normal ordinary day of operation in the temple, something extraordinary was also happening. The Jews had been waiting for centuries for the Messiah, that the great prophets had spoken about. One who would come to redeem Israel. And in the scene before us today, Simeon and Anna were declaring that this small child was in fact the one that the whole nation had been waiting for.

In this we can see that Jesus was not somehow above the law, but rather that he had come to fulfill the law.

At Christmas time we heard the stories of the shepherds and the angels, at Epiphany we had the visit of the wise men from the East, and today we have the scene in the temple in Jerusalem, where Jesus is again declared Messiah, and he still only a baby.

Simeon

Let us now turn to Simeon. Luke describes Simeon as righteous and devout. Simeon was clearly someone who wanted to be in tune with God.

As we read the Old Testament, we hear how the Holy Spirit only came to particular people, at particular times, so they could complete particular tasks. We see as we read the gospels that the Holy Spirit is ever increasing with the arrival of Jesus.

We are told in the scriptures today that the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon, and also that he had been given a special message from God that he would not physically die, before he saw the Messiah.

Simeon was so joyful at the sight of Jesus, that he knew there was nothing else in his life that could top this experience. In Simeon's mind, sighting the baby Jesus was enough to know that God's plans were being fulfilled, and he was happy to die and be with God.

Simeon says these words, known and recited down the ages as "The Song of Simeon" or the "Nunc Dimittis" (Latin for "now let depart")

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:
your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation:

which you have prepared in the sight of every people:

A light to reveal you to the nations:

and the glory of your people Israel.

As Simeon saw Jesus, he knew the peace of God deep within. And this was not only a peace for the Jews. Way back in Genesis 12 we hear how Abraham is to be a blessing to all nations, and Simeon acknowledges this when he says that Jesus is to be, "A light to reveal you to the nations".

These words of Simeon are commonly used at evening prayer and Evensong, and I recite these words as the hearse departs, at each funeral I take.

Anna

Let us now turn to Anna. Anna was the second “witness” recorded, who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, at his presentation in the temple. This seems to indicate that the writer would have known the law as in Deuteronomy (19:15) two witnesses are required.

It appears that Anna was a remarkable woman. The passage tells us that she was of a great age. Eighty-four might not seem that old to us here today, but with life expectancy being much lower in Israel 2000 years ago, it would have been amazing, not to mention she may have been even older as there is some speculation around the translation as to whether, the 84 years is her age or how long she was a widow. At any rate Anna had dedicated a lifetime in the temple, worshipping God with prayer and fasting.

Anna acknowledged Jesus as the child who would redeem Israel, and proclaimed it with great joy to those around her.

Lessons for us

So, what lessons might we take from the lives of Simeon and Anna recorded for us in Lukes Gospel today.

Firstly, we are to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. This almost seems to go without saying if we call ourselves Christians, but we do live in a world where we are constantly distracted, and a world which encourages us to be self centred. If we remain focused on Jesus as the way to God, the way to peace and forgiveness, then we will be enabled to truly live our best lives, as God intended.

Secondly, we can learn patience. Anna worshipped day and night in the temple for decades. Whilst I pray daily, the commitment of Anna to be in the temple day and night over such a long period of time is a great witness to us. Day by day we may not have amazing experiences of God, like Anna and Simeon did in today’s reading, but we can know that if we live with patience as followers of Jesus then we will ultimately be with God.

And thirdly, we can learn persistence. Simeon had been promised he would not die before he saw the Messiah, but he did not know when it would happen. Simeon had the persistence like Anna, to keep turning up at the temple, and not stop worshipping God. The persistence of Simeon and Anna lead to their seeing Jesus, the Messiah, and being able to share and proclaim the Good News of Jesus to those around them.

And finally, I think we can learn about joy. Both Anna and Simeon seem to me to be filled with joy as they experienced seeing Jesus. We may not be able to see Jesus like they did, but we can experience the joy that Jesus gives us, and we can share that joy, with those around us.

Conclusion

Today as we hear the story of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, may we be encouraged by the witness of both Simeon and Anna, and may we be enabled to continue to acknowledge who Jesus is, in our lives, as we join with the words of Simeon:-

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:
your word has been fulfilled.
My own eyes have seen the salvation:
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:
A light to reveal you to the nations:
and the glory of your people Israel.

Amen.