

Anna & Simeon  
Luke 2:21-38  
by Pastor Gary Walters

Luke 2.21.38—“On the eighth day when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. And when the time of their purification according to the law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons. Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout and he was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the holy spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord Christ. So moved by the spirit he went into the temple of courts and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him and then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own heart too." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow until she was 84 years old. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel.” The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

Well, how many of you (I don't want a show of hands) but how many of you have started taking down the Christmas decorations. How many of you is the tree still out or is it taken down, are the decorations put away or are they still up, or the boxes all around getting prepared for getting things tucked back where they'll be for the rest of the year, at least until probably Thanksgiving weekend. Well you shouldn't! Just kidding. I understand the temptation but we are still in the 12 days of Christmas. We need a reminder that Christmas Day is actually one of 12 and that there are 11 more days after that. But, boy I understand that temptation. At our house the Christmas decorations come out on Thanksgiving weekend, its usually the first Sunday of Advent then that the tree gets put up, and the lights on and then we just decorate a little more and a little more those first couple of weeks until the house is fully decked out for Christmas. But, it sure is a disruption . As much as we love to get out those decorations and get the tree out, it takes up a lot of space and all that extra decorations in the house are kind of associated with the hurry and scurry of the Christmas season and there is a sense when Christmas is over and the visits are done and there are still too many cookies sitting on the counter, we just want things to get back to normal to get back into a kind of routine and so we put away the decorations a little earlier. On the radio you don' t hear Christmas carols anymore, but the fact of the matter is that they are more appropriate now then they were in December during Advent. You're supposed to have that slow, solemn anticipation kind of mood, but Thanksgiving weekend we get full into it and the carols and all that. But then on the other hand we tend to put it away a little too soon. I have to admit there is some of that going on in our house too so I don't say that with criticism, I say that with a reminder of where we are at, not just in terms of decorations but where we are personally with a

lot of that Advent celebration.

These 11 days of Christmas that come after Christmas day are really a gift that we need to take full advantage of. They are kind of a forgotten part of our Christmas celebration, but they're not the only thing. Today's scripture lesson fits well into that. Anna and Simeon are often overlooked. When we have the nativity, well there is no room for eight days later and so they don't show up. I don't know how the Wisemen got incorporated into that because the fact of the matter is that they didn't show up for a long time. If you read the account carefully, it says that Jesus was a child and that Mary and Joseph were living in a house. Guess what you will in terms of the time frame there; it was probably a year or too. They usually show up at the end of the Nativity story; but Anna and Simeon just get left out altogether and yet they are kind of one of those surprises that often get overlooked but are tucked in among the Christmas story.

It's worth asking why they are there. Luke had a lot of material to choose from, lots and lots. There are many, many stories that he left out of his gospel and so everything that is there is there for a reason, was chosen for a purpose. There is no filling or fluff or padding in the gospels or in the Christmas story. So, why has Luke inserted this story of Anna and Simeon here. Well it's a good question. What strikes us as significant about Anna and Simeon is that they're old, is it that they have spent so much of their lives and so much time in the temple or is it that having spent so much time in the temple courts that they are so close to God. Certainly they both live with a certain amount of expectation. They both have a great concern for Israel and its future. They both recognize the need for a savior. Simeon at least anticipates the coming Messiah and Anna prophesized that this indeed is the one. Or is it that they are filled and lead by the Holy Spirit? Well, certainly Luke could have put them into the story for all of those reasons, or any of those reasons, but the one I would like to look at this morning, it entails some of those, but it really is a kind of certain perspective or point of view on all of that. I think that Luke inserts them into the story because they see the salvation that God has brought in the Christ child as a present reality. It's not something that is coming, but it's something that is here right now. Of all the people they are in a pretty select crowd to start with because of the people in Jerusalem or in that area, in Bethlehem, the shepherds heard the angel proclamation and came and worshiped Jesus. Later on the Wisemen come, drawn by the signs of the stars, but here in the Temple of Courts its only Simeon and Anna who recognize the significance of what has taken place. Of the thousands and thousands of baby's that they have seen dedicated in the temple, over all the years that they have lived and haunted those halls, they recognized this one child as being something different, something extraordinary, something special. It isn't just a baby, but this is the baby Jesus, this is the Christ, the Messiah. Israel lived in kind of a fevered pitch of expectation for a Messiah. They had longed for this for hundreds of years. In fact, it really goes back about 500 years. And, that anticipation and that sense that God would send a Messiah, somebody to deliver them, has been growing that entire time. And yet, with all that expectation, so few take notice when he finally arrives. But, Anna and Simeon indeed take notice. Not only do they take notice, but in this little baby they see not only the hand of God but they see a messiah. That's kind of a stretch, because for Israel in that day and age the idea of a Messiah is somebody who wields power, who will have the Holy Spirit upon them. Who will lead and guide and deliver the people. That's pretty hard to imagine that in the form of a little baby. And yet, Anna and Simeon aptly recognize the hand of God in this child. Not just the salvation is coming, but that it's already here. That the product of all their hoping, all their anticipation, all their desires, has been fulfilled.

Not unlike our own Christmas preparations and our own advent traditions. We decorate our houses and

follow those traditions of getting out the tree, put the lights on, put lights on our homes and we get out the stockings, and probably a nativity scene or two even, that decorate the house somewhere, and a Christmas village, and on and on and on, and the cookies and going to visit folks and getting prepared for them to come and visit you. All of that is preparation for Christmas. It's an anticipation of what happened and what happens on Christmas day. That there is a realization that Jesus has come. That he has come to us.

Now, the question all that begs is that in the midst of all of your preparations this Advent, is that true? Have those preparations been a preparation for the coming of Christ? Has it been making room for Jesus in your life? Again, I don't want a show of hands, but ask yourself that question very seriously. Do those traditions, do those preparations help or do they hinder our relationship with God? I hope they help, but I know that on occasion I am distracted. That I forget that the decorating and the preparing I forget that they are not an end in themselves, but they are a means of drawing me closer to God. So that I should be closer to God now than I was before Advent started. But, if that isn't the case, the glory is, is that the calendar repeats every year and we've got another opportunity. So when you think ahead of what is going to happen in another 11 months, there is a part where this sermon would be more apt in the middle of November, (Hopefully I will remember to preach on it again at that time), but I think we are all smart enough to take into account or to think ahead and say, "You know, I could do this differently" so that those preparations are done in an attitude of prayer, so that those preparations are done in such a way that they do in fact draw us closer to God. So that we find on Christmas morning, not only has the Christ child come but that he has been with us all along and that we live in his presence and we can fully receive this gift.

I pray that every present and decoration and card and cookie and visit could be wrapped in that kind of prayer and focus. But, really it's not just about our advent preparations. Because, there is a sense in which all that we do should be or could be a preparation for Christ. A making room for him so that how we work and how we interact with family and how we play can become a preparation for the Christ child. Making room for him in our lives, so that we find tomorrow we are closer to God than we are today and that a year from now we are a lot closer than we are today and so that we are always progressing closer and closer more fully into that presence that realization that God is always with us and that in our lives there is always more and more room. Because, Advent has been realized. We live on the far side of the nativity. Christ has come and he is in our midst. Though most in Israel missed it in Jesus' own day, there are two at least who did not, along with the shepherds and maybe a few others, but Anna and Simeon took note. That the longing and the hopes of Israel are fulfilled in this child that they met in the Temple of Courts. So it challenges us, will we recognize that Jesus is in our midst. Or as we put the decorations away, is it just getting back to life as usual, getting back to our routine, or has it made a difference. Have we made more room for God in our lives. I hope indeed that we have made the space, that we might be able to say, with Simeon, "You may dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord."

Would you pray with me please: Lord we thank you that you have come, and as we wind down our Christmas celebrations and put away the decorations, God forbid that we should simply go back to business as usual but help it all be a reminder that you are in our midst and that we live in your care. Help us to carry that into this new year. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.