

Simeon's and Anna's Moment

Luke 2:22-40

1st Sunday after Christmas, December 31, 2017

By: Rev. Susan L. Genge (in partnership with God!)

Prayer: Gracious God, Giver of the greatest Gift, we praise you for coming to us in love and as a human being. Speak to us again of your saving, redeeming love which reaches out to us in the birth of Jesus. Amen.

Simeon and Anna Waited Longingly for the Messiah

Television talk shows are popular and often attract our attention because of the celebrities, mostly attractive young people, who are interviewed by the talk show host. Studio tickets to see live tapings of interviews of the best-known celebrities are often sold out months in advance. When the celebrity emerges from backstage, the studio audience goes wild with applause and cheering. Brief film clips are shown of the celebrities as they appear in their soon-to-be-released new movie. People love to see these celebrities, often movie stars, in live time. They are fascinated by the celebrities' sense of style and fashion, their hairdos and makeup, their mannerisms and body language, their character & personality. They want to know what makes these celebrities tick. What's their *story*?

What if the people who came on stage for a talk show interview were two, plain, *old* people whom nobody has heard of? How full and excited would the studio audience be *then*? Enter Simeon and Anna of Jerusalem, circa 4 B.C.E.

They walk slowly onstage to a quiet audience. There's nothing remarkable about Simeon's and Anna's appearance. They're both grey-haired and wrinkled, with yellowy teeth. There are bags under their eyes and age spots on their hands. Anna is eighty-four years old and Simeon is equally advanced in years. Obviously neither of them has ever been to a spa or had a face lift, a hair colouring or their teeth bleached. You can't see much of their bodies which are discreetly covered by long, beige, loose-fitting robes. Their sandaled feet are leathery and callused.

But the talk show host has heard about them and brought them in because of their amazing experience. The host turns and asks them, “What’s your *story*?”

And humble Simeon says, “I have spent my entire life waiting to see the Messiah, God’s Anointed One. My ancestors lived in slavery to the Egyptians for four hundred years before coming to Israel. Across time we have been invaded by many foreign nations, and conquered and led into exile by the Babylonians. And although we are now living in Israel, we are not free to self-govern. For we live under the harsh occupation of another foreign nation-the Roman Empire.

But I am a man of deep faith, and my hope and trust are in the Lord. I know the scriptures and God’s promise to the ancient prophets, that *someday* God will send the Messiah to lead us and set us free.

Simeon’s and Anna’s Waiting Was Rewarded

I go to the Temple every day and I pray to God to send us the Messiah. One day the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and told me that I wouldn’t die until I got to see the Messiah. And then, that wonderful day came. The Spirit led me into the Temple just as this devoted young couple was dedicating their little boy to God by having him named and circumcised. There was something very *special* about this child. And right then, God spoke to my heart and said, “This is he.” And I took that little child in my arms and praised God for letting me meet the Messiah. This child is God’s salvation of the world, a Light to reveal God to the Gentile nations of the earth, and the glory of Israel.

I felt overcome with *joy* as I held that precious child, God’s promise fulfilled. I blessed the child and his parents. And then I spoke this truth to his mother Mary- that her son would be a centre of controversy, conflict and rejection, the cause of the fall and rise of many in Israel. It would cause her piercing grief.”

Now it was Anna’s turn to tell her story. “My husband died at a young age and I have been a widow most of my life. I too, have a deep love for God and

great faith. The temple is the place where I feel closest to God, so I spend my days and evenings here worshiping God and fasting and praying. I too, long to meet the Messiah, the promised King to come and deliver Jerusalem.

Then, my prayers were answered. I walked into the Temple one day and saw this loving young couple dedicating their little boy to God in the circumcision and naming ritual. And I *knew* deep in my heart, that this child is God's chosen one, the Messiah for whom we have all been waiting so long. I rejoiced and praised God and told everyone the Good News, that our Redeemer has come!"

When Simeon and Anna finished their testimonies, you could have heard a pin drop in the television studio. The talk show host and audience were hushed, overcome with awe. These two people had prayed and waited their *whole* lives for God to send the Messiah, & in their old age, God had answered their prayers.

Simeon and Anna never gave up on God, never gave up hope. They kept worshiping, praying and trusting in God. They knew that God is good and that God keeps promises. So they spent their lifetimes preparing themselves for that day. Their hearts were open, expectant and ready to meet the Messiah.

We Wait for the Messiah's Blessing in Our Lives

It's an important way for us to live too- with open, expectant hearts,
 ready at any time for God to appear and move among us,
 ready for the new things God is leading us into,
 ready to receive God's goodness,
 ready for God to heal, save and restore.

Sometimes we're impatient with God. We want God to answer our prayers immediately. "Yesterday would be even *better* God!" Then we remember the enduring patience of Simeon and Anna who waited a *lifetime* to be blessed by the coming of the Messiah.

Should we expect God to answer our prayers immediately? Sometimes God *does* that. Hallelujah! And other times, God makes us *wait*. God provides for us and blesses us in God's own good time and way. Hallelujah for that too!

Our Waiting Is Rewarded

There are *benefits* to waiting. While we worship, pray, and trustingly wait, we grow in faith, trust and wisdom, in spiritual and emotional maturity.

On December 15, there was a news story about a young Bangladeshi bride named Popi Rani Das. She came to Toronto because of a promise made to her nearly two years ago in a cramped hospital room in the Acid Survivors Foundation Hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Das, then 27, had spent *seven* years in that room, in pain and often sick, after her husband gave her a glass of acid to drink. Das had thought that the clear, colourless liquid was water, and when she drank it, it burned away her entire esophagus and most of her stomach. Since she could no longer swallow, she needed the electrical outlet in her hospital room to power a blender so that she could squeeze pureed meals into a feeding tube inserted into her small intestine. The acid attack had also damaged her voice box and airway, making it difficult to breathe. Each winter it put her at risk for deadly pneumonia.

Bangladeshi doctors said that she had little hope of getting better, but Das refused to believe that. She kept waiting and hoping that something could be done to heal her.

And her patient wait was rewarded. One day, Toronto plastic surgeon Dr. Toni Zhong, who was in Bangladesh on a medical mission, walked into her hospital room and offered her hope. She promised Das that she would take her case to the best surgeons she knew.

It took a year, but Zhong kept her promise. Within months she had raised \$700,000 from several donors, and on February 15 this year, Das was brought to Toronto for surgeries.

The surgeons and anesthetists who operated on her waived their fees. Toronto General Hospital opened an operating room during off hours for the surgeries.

Three surgeries later, Popi Rani Das can swallow and eat again. And after almost a year recovering in Canada, she'll soon be returning to Bangladesh to begin her new life. She had waited patiently, hopefully and trustingly, and God provided her with caring doctors and medical institutions to save her.

What are *you* waiting for? What would *most* delight your heart?
What do you desire more than *anything* else in the world?

Do you want God to give you peace of heart and mind? *Pray* for that, and never give up hope. God can give you peace through Jesus, our Saviour.

Do you want healing? *Pray* for that and never give up hope. God can give you healing through Jesus, our Saviour.

Do you want wisdom, clarity and understanding? *Pray* for that and never give up hope. God can give it to you through Jesus, our Saviour.

Do you want reconciliation and unity? *Pray* for that and never give up hope. God can bring reconciliation and unity through Jesus.

Do you want world peace, freedom and justice for all? Do you want good leadership, cooperation and goodwill among nations? *Pray* for that, and never give up hope. God can unite the nations through Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

What faithful old Simeon and Anna knew and acknowledged millennia ago, has come to pass. In Jesus, the Messiah, God is in the business of saving- individuals, communities, nations and the world.

Did you hear the latest good news from the medical research world? New medical interventions have been developed to heal and prevent Huntington Disease. How long have people struggling with this disease been waiting for a cure? For some, their entire *lifetime*. And now their hopeful, persistent patience is being rewarded. They and future generations will be saved from this illness.

And someday, there'll be the same good news for all people waiting for cures for their medical conditions. Because God loves us so much, that our healing God has come to us in the flesh, in the form of a vulnerable, beloved, tiny baby named Jesus.

The Messiah, our Saviour, has come! Rejoice!

Great things lie ahead for the world!

And the exciting news is that we're *all* needed and called to be participants in Christ's salvific work.

Let us, like old Simeon and Anna, keep worshiping, praying, hoping, trusting and waiting for God's blessings.

Our faithful waiting will be rewarded. God has promised!

Amen.