

When our daughter Amelia was just four days old we brought her to church for the very first time. A new baby in the worshipping community brings a buzz of excitement. Most of us like babies. There is something wonderful about seeing those tiny fingers and toes, the chubby cheeks, and mewly cries of a newborn.

Even more than the things we love about seeing babies, we are also greatly encouraged when children are born in a church community. In the birth of children there is hope!

Today, as Mary and Joseph bring the eight day old Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem we come face to face with a hope, not just for a local worshiping community, not just for Jerusalem, or even the Israelite people; we come face to face with a hope for the whole world. **{slide 2}**

As we dig into that hope we're going 'Set the Scene' with the rituals in the Temple vv.22-24.

Then we'll consider Simeon and Anna: vv.25-38 before we wrap up by asking 'What do we learn about Jesus from them?'

Pray:

i) Setting the Scene

{slide 3} Mary, Joseph and Jesus are at the Temple in Jerusalem. Our cultures are so far apart that we can miss some of what Luke is pointing to in this account.

Mary and Joseph are devout, they keep the Law. It doesn't surprise us, we've seen it before. Mary declared "I am the Lord's servant.¹" when she received the most disturbing, most amazing news, that she would have this child, conceived by the Holy Spirit. Matthew recorded that Joseph 'was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.²'

They are faithful people, who trust God and keep the Law.

The Leviticus reading this morning, described what was required after childbirth. Both a woman's monthly cycle and giving birth made a woman ceremonially unclean.

Within the framework of the Law a person can be made unclean two ways. From outside contamination - touching something dead, by eating an unclean animal; or from internal contamination; bodily emissions, both male and female.

These two different ways of being unclean before God help remind Israel of her status as a Holy nation, God's chosen people. They face challenges of impurity from the inside, as well as the outside. Sin, isn't just something outside to keep away from, but rises up from inside as well.

¹ Luke 1:38

² Matthew 1:19

So, Mary comes to have the distance between her and God removed; a sacrifice is made v.24. Mary and Joseph are poor. They can't afford the ideal lamb, but they are able to offer these birds, sold at the Temple, an exception to the rule which shows God's grace; atonement is available for all and any, not just those who are wealthy or upwardly mobile.

ii) Simeon and Anna

{slide 4} That's emphasised again as we meet Simeon and Anna, people who are godly but on the margins. We aren't told so much about Simeon; except that he was righteous and devout, and unusually, full of the Holy Spirit v.25.

On this side of the cross, for those of us who have accepted Jesus as the Lord of our lives, it's a given that the people of God have the Holy Spirit. But before the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, after Jesus' death and resurrection, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit was extremely rare. Yet, God is doing something linked with the coming of the Messiah.

There have been manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people connected with Jesus!

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John the Baptist, Mary Elizabeth and Zechariah are all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now, this pattern, of the Holy Spirit touching down where Jesus was, happens to Simeon. One day, it will be extended for any who accept him as Lord!

{slide 6} Already having foreknowledge that he wouldn't die until he's seen the promised Messiah he is moved to make his way to the Temple v.27, and there he comes across Jesus and his family.

He proclaims Jesus as Saviour, and enters a new phase in his life. He is now ready to depart this world, knowing that God is saving His people.

Simeon blesses them, and gives a warning to Mary. Despite the salvation Jesus will bring, her won heart will be pierced. Some of us know that feeling of the loss of a child, in infancy, or as adults. The mother of the Lord Jesus has been there. She saw her son cruelly nailed to a Roman Cross, with our sin heaped on his shoulders. There has been great rejoicing at Jesus birth, but there will also be great sorrow.

Anna, a woman with credentials, also sees this family and lets anyone who will listen know that she has seen the Saviour.

They are both older. Anna is 84, a tremendous age! Their age lends authority to their witness.

There are two witnesses, an essential element of reliable testimony in the OT Law.

They both recognise who Jesus is - the promised Saviour.

They have both waited in faith for God to act; Simeon, v.25 tells us was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and Anna v.38 for the redemption of Jerusalem. They have lived with a real hope, that God would Save. They are the opposite of Ahaz, who refused to stand firm in his faith in Isaiah 7:9.

They have trusted the Word of God and obeyed it, well into their old age.

They have no status, they aren't officers of the Temple, they aren't priests, they are poor in spirit, but their faith hasn't failed.

I'm sure we all know people who have walked away from the Lord. It's heartbreaking, when the waiting for God reveals a shallow faith. I've been so encouraged in this church community to see so many faithful older people, who have persevered in faith despite the trials and tragedies of life.

I hope there is an encouragement for you in Anna and Simeon's waiting. They have grown old in a way that is godly. Growing old gracefully isn't easy is it?

Sleep is hard to come by, bodies start to fail us, pain becomes a constant reality, we are frustrated as we have to stop doing things we once loved.

We can feel isolated and lonely as our influence diminishes and instead of making decisions for our children, they start to make decisions for us.

It's enough to make you want to stay in bed sin't it?

Those who refuse to wait on the Lord drift away. While those like Anna and Simeon pray, and praise, and wait with eager anticipation for the Messiah. They share the good news and wait patiently, trusting that God's Way is the best way. What wonderful examples they are to those of us who are ageing, of how to remain steadfast in the Lord.

iii) What do we learn?

{slide 7} What do we learn from these prophecies, proclamations Anna and Simeon make about Jesus?

{slide 8} We are reminded again of God's ever expanding grace. His love for us, His aim to see all of his creation saved and living in a right relationship with Him. v. 30-32 Jesus is 'a light for revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel.' From this point onwards, we see the fullness of God's rescue plan in action. The praise to Abraham is coming true in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, the Saviour. Every tribe and nation, and language will be united around the throne of God giving Him praise and glory because of the salvation offered in Jesus.

{slide 9} Jesus come to reveal the condition of hearts v.35

He shows us the impurity that comes from the inside; Jesus spoke of this impurity in Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

It is here, at this very moment, with two witnesses, credible and respectable, godly people, who have waited faithfully, that the eight day old Jesus is affirmed as the Christ again. In this setting

he is pointed to as the one who will reveal the uncleanness inside, he will reveal the thoughts of many hearts. v.35.

It is in the moment when Mary has come to the Temple to make ceremonial uncleanness right with God under the Law that we are pointed to our greatest need, which can only be fulfilled in Jesus.

We don't need external cleansing, we don't need to make sacrifices, we need new hearts. We need the desires of our hearts to be spotlighted, and made clear to us. Because we know ourselves, don't we? We know that as much as we are the people of God, we fail. We fall short of his glory. We excuse our rebellion and we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

We're good at justifying the desires of our hearts aren't we?

It can't be an ungodly relationship if it's undergirded by love, Love is love isn't it? Surely it's from God.

It can't be wrong to fudge a deal if I give some of the money to the church. Generosity is in the Bible isn't it? Surely God blesses those who give.

It can't be wrong sharing that little thing I know can it? They could pray for them could'n't they? Surely knowing is a good thing.

It can't be wrong if I am harsh for their own good. Children need to be disciplined don't they? Surely it'll keep them out of trouble.

But Jesus shows us the state of our hearts before Him; the sin in relationships, the love of money, the desire to gossip, the control we want over children.... If we all added just one ungodly desire to that list I reckon it would stretch to the moon and back again. I could probably manage that myself in just my heart alone!

It's easy to look faithful. We turn up to church from time to time, maybe even every week, maybe twice a week. We can have our names on the rosters. We can give our finances to the work of the Church. We can serve morning teas, arrange flowers, help with working bees, we can go to a home group and turn up to prayer meeting.

It is so easy to look like our hearts are in good shape, but on the inside we can be suffering from unforgiveness, anger, family feuds, financial fear, sexual sin, greed, a desire to influence, words that tear down not build up.

We need Jesus to shine that light on our hearts. To open them to our eyes, so that we can repent, and change so that we can be renewed in our minds by the Holy Spirit. So that we can grow in godliness, and know freedom from bondage which only comes through the one who consoles. The one who redeems. The one who is good news for all the people. The one who is the very manifestation of the love of God, who reveals our hearts because He is kind. We need Jesus to show us our hearts.

Yet in this revealing of the condition of our hearts, **{slide 10}** Jesus will bring division. V.34. 'This child is destined to cause the rising and falling of many in Israel, and will be a sign that will be spoken against.'

Jesus' way will be opposed. The great reversal he was bringing, the salvation he was offering would become point a of division. Some would respond to the grace of God and choose life in all its fulness, as they believed in Jesus to have their sin forgiven.

Others, would have their hearts revealed as hardened, unwilling to accept the grace of God offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Unwilling to heed his teaching, and have their lives conformed to the pattern He desires for us that we might live godly and upright lives, in a close relationship with our creator, and loving heavenly Father.

John Edwards reminds us that 'The Son of God, like the cloud of divine presence in Exod 14:20, brings darkness to one side and light to another.'³

On the day of Judgement when He returns, the second Advent which we live for now. 'All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.'⁴

“Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'⁵ There's nothing we like about that truth is there? It is hard teaching, from the lips of Jesus, and yet again, it reveals his grace. It reveals his grace, and his love, and his mercy - because we should all be standing on his left when we examine the condition of our hearts. **{slide 11}**

But this is the same God who offers forgiveness full and free from the uncleanness inside us. Who doesn't give us what we deserve, but came among us as a weak and frail baby, humble and poor, to redeem us, to save us. Like Anna and Simeon what other response could we make, but to praise God and tell anyone who would listen of this amazing news that has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit?

Why don't we praise Him now in prayer?

Pray:

³ Edwards, J. R. (2015). [The Gospel according to Luke](#) (D. A. Carson, Ed.; p. 87). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos.

⁴ Matthew 25:32-33

⁵ Matthew 25:41