

Worship 8th January, 2023

Luke 2:22-38

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought their baby up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word,
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Homily 1: Seeing and recognising life

What a wonderful story – filled with life and colour – as Mary and Joseph bring their baby to Jerusalem to dedicate him, their firstborn, to God. There is Simeon, who has been waiting and hoping and anticipating for many years; and there is Anna, the 84 year old widowed prophet, who has been filled with longing and hope: waiting for the promised Messiah. What joyous anticipation!?



Can you imagine Simeon and Anna coming each day hoping this will be the day of the coming of God’s chosen one?... As Simeon held the baby in his arms that day, he knew this was the day. In this baby, he saw the promise of God fulfilled: declaring that his eyes have now seen God’s salvation. And Anna, who is sure that Jesus is the answer to Israel’s redemption, called the people together and she told them, “This is the Messiah!”



There is a modern painting of this scene, 'Simeon and Anna with the Christ Child', painted by Dinah Roe Kendall. For those who can't see it, I will describe it. Simeon is carefully holding the baby in his arms. He is dressed in a pink and blue shirt; and his grey hair is hanging untidily down the back of his neck. And there is Anna: she has her back to us, facing the people who are congregating in the temple, calling to them, "This is the one we've been waiting for." She is wearing a blue suit and hat: leaning on a walking stick. She needs the stick for stability; so she can walk without falling. Frail yet strong, she is pointing to Jesus, calling the people to come and see. Our attention, too, is drawn to the baby as Simeon looks down at him with great yearning as he exclaims,



"At last you are allowing your servant to go in peace, Lord.
For now, with my own eyes,
I have seen your rescue operation underway.
I have seen the launch of the life you have been preparing for the world and its peoples.
I have seen the light which will make you known to the nations,
the light which will have your people basking in glory."

The baby is looking directly at us as we look at the painting. Jesus is looking right at you. It is he who brings you the life of God.... Mary is holding her heart: the same heart that Simeon predicts will be pierced later in Jesus' life.

This is about seeing the promises of God fulfilled in a baby. After years of waiting, Simeon and Anna see a baby and recognise God with us in him, in Jesus. We may think it strange that God acts in this way; and remarkable that these two elderly people, after years of watching and waiting, see God present in this baby. Yet, that is how it is.

Do you see God with us in this baby? Do you recognise the life of God is given to you in Jesus? A light to the world? Do you see God with us today: here in this worship space and at home as you join in via zoom or phone? Do you recognise God is present and active in our Wednesday BBQs and through Larder and Kid's Hope and the Voices of Frankston Choir and the Frankston Brekky Club and the Friday Playgroup?

It's about watching and waiting expectantly: trusting that God is present and active in people's lives – in your life: reaching out, breathing us to life – even though we may need a walking stick or a wheely walker for stability.

Because God promises to be with us wherever we are, we take the light of Christ with us out into the world. This light, that shines in each one of us as we go about our lives day by day, shines through us to the people we meet and interact with. And, it can give us confidence to be like Simeon and Anna, so we can tell them about what we have seen and heard: sharing our faith in Christ.

Simeon was so elated by what he saw in the baby Jesus that his life was fulfilled; and, in peace, he was ready to die. Let's sing about that in

Lord, bid Your servant go in peace,

We Sing: Lord, bid your servant go in peace (TiS 324)

Homily 2: Moving beyond stereotypes to respect



Simeon was able to see God's salvation, life for all people, when he looked at Mary and Joseph's tiny baby. He was able to see salvation because he had hope that God was still active, that God had greater things yet in store for the world. Anna, 84 years old, widowed for many decades, was able to see the child, and praising God, speak about him to all in Jerusalem who were looking for life from God.



It's worth noting, in the male dominated, patriarchal society of those times, that the first two chapters of Luke's gospel give prominence to three notable women: Mary, Elizabeth and Anna. It's even more striking that they speak in public; and are listened to....

I look out here today, and I see many older people who, like Anna and Simeon, have been living faithfully throughout their lives. Women and men who have given leadership in the community as well as in the church; offering their God-given talents for the betterment of individuals and communities. Women and men who have learnt from the ups and downs of their experience and, now, offer their wisdom and insight. Thank you. Your gift to us and to others has enriched countless people's lives. The care, love and hospitality shared through the outreach ministries I spoke of earlier – as well as prayer for people in need by individuals and members of the Prayer Chain and leadership by the Church Council and Elders - blesses us and brings the life of God close.

As you look at these people and as you live your life, do you see God present and active?

Anna and Simeon invite us to look at life: including how we see older people. Looking forward to the future with hope is one of the keys to seeing God's salvation.



The ABC series 'Old People's Home for Teenagers', shown during 2022, gives us some clues about this. For six weeks, a group of lonely teenagers and a group of older people living alone were brought together. At the start, each was interviewed about how they viewed the other group. Alongside some apprehension and confusion, there were many stereotypical responses from each group:

- Teenagers are selfish, lacking in drive, always on their mobiles texting or playing video games.
- Old people are old, they're often grumpy; and they can't do much anymore.



As they gave themselves to the experiment, the stereotypes were broken down. Facing a series of challenges, they got to know each other; they looked deeply at one another and made lasting friendships. The teenagers discovered, as they listened to the vast range of experiences the old people had had, that they had much wisdom to share; and that they, too, struggled during their adolescence yet made it through to adulthood.

The Oldies care built the teenagers' optimism and confidence; and gave them a sense of belonging that transformed their loneliness and gave them hope.



As they finished, an older man said, "It's been the highlight of my life. At the beginning, I felt as though I was waiting for God – waiting for the bus to cart me off. But, now, I don't mind if the bus has a flat tyre. I want to live longer. I feel privileged discovering a friendship with young Fred."

As we came out of COVID lockdown, I rejoiced to be able to come to worship here – with you. The separation helped me to discover anew how important it is to be here, in this church community. You are my family. You see, it is as we interact and give ourselves to one another that we find meaning and purpose, hope and resilience: for God is with us; and, like Simeon and Anna, as we give ourselves to hope-filled waiting and praying, gathering in community, we see God's salvation and are blessed with life from God. Amen. Thanks be to God.