

January 31, 2021 sermon for the presentation of Christ in the temple, Luke chapter 2 versus 22 to 40.

It seems strange we're back at the beginning with a baby Jesus. In fact we are 40 days since the celebration of his birth, well 38 to be exact. For us we're already in the New Year, we've had Sundays of epiphany, of Jesus beginning of his ministry and being revealed as the son of God the Messiah so it feels unusual to be dragged back to the baby Jesus.

Yet here we are in the temple with baby Jesus. Today we recall what happened for every firstborn male in the Jewish tradition. The parents carried the child into the temple with sacrificial doves. They were only doing what was required of them. Yet it became a significant moment for the parents and also for two onlookers.

Unknown to Mary and Joseph, were these two old people Simeon and Anna. They weren't a couple rather they were two devout

worshippers, who spent a lot of time in the temple courts.

Simeon is the 1st to approach the couple and in a rather drastic move Simeon takes hold of the child from the mother, this might have been a surprise for the parents, "who is this man what is he doing? and then they listen to what he says.

The words he says are known to us as the Nunc Dimittis, Latin for "Now you dismiss". Often said at night prayer and at the end of a funeral.

These words speak of Simeon's life being fulfilled in holding the child Messiah, they are words of worship and adoration that God has done what he promised to do. In fact verse 32 says that the Messiah will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

The Messiah has come to bring light to non-Jewish people, what a surprising thought that Simeon sees the Messiah bringing light to non-Jewish people.

And secondly bringing glory to the people of Israel. As we know from the gospel this was achieved in a very different way.

I love the way that Luke has this First hand Account of the story as he says that the parents **marvelled** at what was said about the child, we might say they were gobsmacked.

Then Simeon carries on to talk to the parents directly about how Jesus's life and ministry will impact the nation, in fact these are quite terrifying words for the parents to hear.

Look at verse 34 and 35 again how would you feel if these are said to you about your child. I think the challenge of parenting this baby just got even harder.

As Simeon is close to God, so he has the spiritual sight to see how Jesus will live. And the impact is that Mary will also suffer, he says a sword will pierce your own soul to. Metaphorically we know this to be true.

What started out as a happy moment now has a dark cloud hanging over it.

The second person to encounter the couple was Anna, we see how old she was and how long she had waited in the temple, she too was waiting for God to act.

Again unconventionally rather than speak to the parents about the child, Anna tells the other worshippers who this child is, in a startling epiphany revelation. Which is apt as we close this epiphany season today.

I've been thinking this week about Simeon and Anna, and wondering about their devotion compared to my own devotion.

What has sustained them through all those years of waiting? What resources have they had to inspire them. I think we can learn from this couple about enduring faith.

A couple of weeks ago we heard about the story of Samuel hearing The voice of God. The story included the phrase **the lamp of God had not yet gone out**. I think that Simeon and Anna in their seeking after God, were keeping the lamp of God alight in their day.

We too are called to keep the lamp of God alight in our day, to keep the good news of Jesus fresh, and to rely and be resourced by the Holy Spirit. So we might act as God would have us act and so we might speak as God wants us to speak.

So here are three practical ways to try to be like Simeon and Anna.

First motivation. Simeon and Anna were motivated by wanting to see God fulfilling his word.

So what motivates us to worship God? What directs our way of life? If we found the answer to these questions we would be able to draw nearer to the one who loves us so much he sent his son to save us.

The second practical way is to pray and delve deep into Scriptures, regular pray and Bible reading, taking time to ponder and reflect will allow us to discover God speaking to our lives. Prayer will be less about our needs and more about being still in his presence.

The third action for us to take is to renew our minds, so that Gods thoughts are uppermost, so that the holy spirit is at work renewing our intentions, guiding our actions and our hearts and minds open to the inspiration of the holy spirit. This is a constant challenge to keep our minds focused on God through the day.

If all this sounds challenging to our daily lives, I have

as my motivation Psalm 91 verse one. Verse one says “whoever dwells in the shelter of the most high, shall rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

For me I see the connection between dwelling in the shelter and experiencing rest. During these last 12 months rest has been hard to achieve. But I believe that by dwelling or abiding in God as a daily activity we might discover a new way of resting. And through this resting we might find a new motivation for life which honours God in new ways.

So we close the season of epiphany, of God revealing himself to us and I hope from this season we can move forward knowing that God wants to make himself known to us, in new ways every day.

Amen