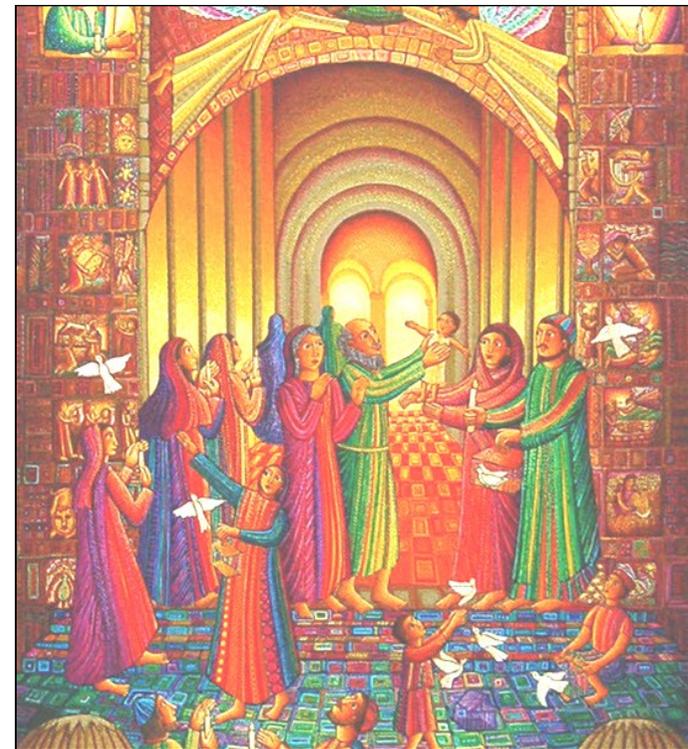


NAMBUCCA VALLEY ANGLICANS WORSHIP at HOME

Presentation
30.01.2022

SUPPLEMENT

SENTENCE, COLLECT, READINGS & HOMILY
for today 30 January 2022



Detail of **Presentation of Christ in the Temple** by John August Swanson 2004

ARTIST'S NOTES

Mary and Joseph take the child Jesus to the temple with the offering of two doves. This was the offering of the poorest. It was a symbol of thanksgiving for their firstborn. At the entrance they meet Simeon and Anna who are both old and waiting and praying in the temple. They both approach the family and honor the new born Jesus.

Full image on back page.

Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Sentence

My eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.

Luke 2:30-32

Collect Prayer of the Day

Christ our cornerstone,
you were recognised at your presentation in the Temple
as a sign of hope for the world,
but also as a stumbling-block for many:
help us so to present ourselves for your service,
that, in sharing your scandal,
we may become a people acceptable to you.
In your name we pray. Amen

But we are learning how to be present to the smallness of it, ready to receive. And we are embracing vulnerability. With everything stripped away, Christ has made himself known in unforeseen ways through the very limitations we were striving to overcome. It turns out a baby isn't just small—it's also precious and wonderful.

Everyone is looking for rescue, for wrongs to be made right, for suffering to be over in these bewildering, beleaguering times. Anna joyfully points us all to the child and repeats her message: He is everything. He is our consolation. And there is no shortage in him, and as Isaiah 9:7 says, no end to the increasing peace he brings.

Consolation grows in the sharing

Anna made a point of talking about Jesus to all who were waiting for redemption (v. 38). Again, Luke returns to that word *prosdechomenos*. The countless crowds Anna tells about Jesus are marked by that same readiness to receive.

Anna didn't view Jesus as a secret revelation exclusively for her. No possessive stinginess, no scarcity mentality. As in the feeding of the 5,000, the gospel always multiplies itself to fill the hungry crowds with more left to spare. God's comfort is intended to reach ever outward.

Anna didn't wait to see how Christ's life unfolded before spreading the word. She didn't need to see how things turned out first. And the sharing itself expanded her own joy.

We're all part of Anna's audience.

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deliberately listening to God's Spirit. We are told that the Holy Spirit rested on him (v. 25), the Holy Spirit showed things to him (v. 26), and the Holy Spirit moved him (v. 27).

Intelligent listening meant that Simeon discerned the difference between his own impulses and the leading of God. It meant being willing to take in the difficult messages and not just what he wanted to hear. And it meant stepping out in obedience, acting on what he heard.

Consolation overturns our expectations

The outcome of Simeon's listening is one of the most tender scenes in Scripture: Simeon enters the temple to discover Mary and Joseph with their newborn. Then he picks up baby Jesus (v. 28). He has the distinction of being the only person in the Bible who we are explicitly told held the Christ child in his arms.

In that act, he provided a striking visual of not just meeting Jesus but receiving him unto himself. As Simeon gazed into the brand-new eyes of the Ancient of Days, Christ for him went from being "God with us" to "God with me." Comfort has no real meaning until general truth takes on concrete, personal dimensions.

Nothing outwardly about Simeon's life had changed, yet he told God he could die in peace (Luke 2:29). His inner disquiet had been calmed by Christ, and his soul was at rest.

Simeon knew the consolation of Israel was *not an event or a change, but a person*.

Anna responded to Jesus much the same way as Simeon. His sheer existence was the only evidence she needed to recognize God's redemptive hand. Christ—a baby who couldn't even walk—became the focal point of her praise.

We pin our hopes on answers more than on the one who answers. We can pray with very specific, singular responses in mind that we'll accept from God as adequate. When he doesn't respond according to our narrow guidelines, we despair. Meanwhile, Christ arrives in our distress as wordlessly as a baby, bundled in a form we didn't see coming.

The church I pastor met in a middle school before the pandemic arrived. Due to the lockdown, we suddenly found ourselves to be a homeless congregation. And we remained so for 18 months. Returning to in-person services this fall felt like starting over. Numbers are still low. Our capacities are reduced. Holiday traditions have been scaled back.

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Reading from the Old Testament: Malachi 3:1-4

- 1 'I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,' says the Lord Almighty.
- 2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.
- 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.
- 4

Psalm 24

- 1 The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it:
the compass of the world and those who dwell therein.
- 2 For he has founded it upon the seas:
and established it upon the waters.
- 3 Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord:
or who shall stand in his holy place?
- 4 Those who have clean hands and a pure heart:
**who have not set their soul upon idols,
nor sworn their oath to a lie.**
- 5 They shall receive blessing from the Lord:
**and recompense from the God
of their salvation.**
- 6 Of such a kind as this are those who seek him:
those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.
- 7 Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be lifted up, you
everlasting doors:
and the King of glory shall come in.
- 8 Who is the King of glory?:
**the Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.**
- 9 Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be lifted up,
You everlasting doors:
and the King of glory shall come in.
- 10 Who is the King of glory?:
the Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

While their age might seem incidental, in truth it highlights the limits of their stellar-ness. Despite being above reproach and worthy of admiration, they could not lengthen their own days. Both were aware of their own frailty and their inability to change it.

In other words, they were reaching the end of themselves, which is precisely when Christ shows up. Grace most often appears when we have no resources of our own to meet the need.

A global crisis has a way of highlighting human limits and lack of control. Like many others over the past two years, I have exhausted myself while attempting to “figure out” and strategize a way forward, all to minimal effect. Accepting the powerlessness of the moment has made more room to see God’s hand in it.

Consolation is more about welcome than change

Luke introduces Simeon with a word that is normally translated as “waiting” (*prosdechomenos*). But it could also be rendered as “ready to receive to oneself.” The term expresses an eagerness to welcome.

That emphasis transforms the concept of waiting from excruciating endurance to active anticipation. Simeon counted the days until God revealed what he had promised to him personally.

Similarly, Anna had planted herself in God’s presence for decades, turning the grief of a young widow into a lifelong prayer. Waiting on the Lord became her daily practice. Ann Voskamp once wrote, “This waiting on God is the very real work of the people of God.”

My own waiting often feels like impatience and irritation. I grit my teeth and try to just hold on until I can move past whatever my current trial looks like. I want to get *out*, not welcome *in*.

What would it look like to shift into a mindset where we are ready to receive more than escape? Our hardships look different through the lenses of curiosity and welcome. We can adopt George MacDonald’s perspective and say, “Come, then, affliction, if my Father wills, and be my frowning friend.”

Simeon’s own name provides a clue how to go about that, because it comes from a word that means “to hear intelligently.” I have far more practice hearing fearfully. Or angrily. Or just half-heartedly. Simeon, on the other hand, is portrayed as

the minds of the characters in the Gospel. I hope they do the same for you.

Now it is time to hand over to Jeff Peabody.

CONSOLATION

Simeon's Song of Praise by Arent de Gelder



The following reflection is taken from an article by Jeff Peabody in **Christianity Today** published on 17 Dec 2021.

It seems particularly appropriate to our common situation with being Church in the face of the Covid pandemic.

Waiting for Jesus: Lessons from Simeon and Anna

In a recent New York Times article, Jeremy Greene of John Hopkins University outlined the psychic impact of the past two tumultuous years on society. He said, "What we are living through now is a new cycle of collective dismay."

Collective dismay. There is a universal ache for an end to our current distress (Rom. 8:22). The cry "How long, O Lord?" resonates as we navigate a second pandemic-shaped Advent.

Feeling chronically on hold has led me back to the biblical theme of consolation—comfort in the wake of loss or disappointment. In the birth narratives about Jesus, we meet Simeon and Anna, who were also "waiting for consolation" (Luke 2:25). They have much to speak into our context.

Consolation meets us in our powerlessness

Two things stand out about these characters. First, they were both stellar people. Scripture describes Simeon as being righteous *and* devout (Luke 2:25). Luke assigns Anna a place among the prophets (v. 36), which simply means, as Dan Darling put it, "she was gifted and unafraid to declare the word of the Lord."

A second, more mundane, observation is that they were both very old. Simeon knew he was near the end of his time on earth. Anna was 84, well beyond the era's average life expectancy (v. 37).

New Testament Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18

- 14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil –
- 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.
- 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.
- 17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.
- 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Gospel of Luke 2:22-40

- 22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord
- 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'),
- 24 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'.
- 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.
- 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When
the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the
custom of the Law required,
28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:
29 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,
31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'
33 The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said
about him.
34 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,
35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'
36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of
the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her
husband seven years after her marriage,
37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never
left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and
praying.
38 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 Jerusalem.
39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by
the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own
town of Nazareth.
40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with
wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Note from the Rector

This last week has not been one of my best ever. Not much fun with a bug - not Covid, I got tested - that left me with some post-viral fatigue that hit me for six.

Early on Tuesday morning I made a start on my reflection looking at the who?, what?, when?. and where? of the Gospel from Luke. Unfortunately, I had absolutely no energy and kept falling asleep.

God has a most wonderful way of providing when we are depleted which never fails to amaze me. Maybe I should apologise to God for my continued amazement and learn to trust more.

As I was looking for an image of Simeon and Anna with the Christ child, I came across this reflection from **Christianity Today**. The experience of the pastor in New York was similar to ours with Covid frustrations during intermittent lockdowns. Jeff Peabody has put together an excellent reflection on the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

Thankfully on the mend today, which is good as we had a Parish Council meeting this morning. I hope the following words, combined with the Sunday Papers and Pew Sheet will help to sustain you in the days ahead.

Grace and peace in abundance be yours

Pete

I have given the reflection an extra title - **CONSOLATION** - as this is a theme Jeff returns to in his reflection.

It is very interesting how many "older" people God uses in the ongoing work of creation that we see in the Christmas story and beyond. Elizabeth and Zechariah with their son John and today Simeon and Anna as they welcome Jesus and see who he was. AS might imagine what it was like for them, Rachel Mann in the Sunday Papers takes imaginative flight and leaves us with some memorable phrases. This one from Simeon:

For years, noting. I saw all the candidates. The preachers and revolutionaries. The down-at-heel princelings. The sheep in wolf's clothing. The criminals pulling a trick. The men who offer promises and get nailed up the next day.

And then from the lips of Anna:

As if God treats the old with such contempt. As if women are second rate. As if my lack of a teacher's education means I could not know what was on God's heart.

These imaginative writings in the Sunday Papers help to take me into