

“Be Ready to Be God’s Presence”

Luke 2:25-38

God used all kinds of different people to give witness to the coming of His Son into the world. What may surprise us is that seniors played a major role in being God’s witnesses to the Messiah’s birth. The first people to know that God was about to fulfill prophecy was an elderly couple who never had children – Zechariah and Elizabeth. God chose them to finally have a child in their later years who would be the prophet (John the Baptist) to prepare the world for Jesus’ coming. And Elizabeth would greatly encourage Mary, who would also have a God-orchestrated pregnancy.

Not long after Jesus was born God uses seniors again, to testify that the baby Jesus was indeed the coming Saviour and future king of the world. Simeon and Anna, two elderly believers were willing to give witness that Jesus was the Messiah. What did these seniors have in common? Why did God choose them?

As a senior, I think we can become a little lethargic as we get older and become less involved in God’s work. Understandably, there are things we can’t do like we used to but our experience and spiritual maturity are an asset greatly needed for the next generations coming behind us, looking to you for guidance and help. And it goes for all adults. Even you in your thirties and early forties are looked up to by those in their late teens and early twenties for guidance because you have more life experience than them.

Here in Luke 2, Luke quickly in vv.21-24 walks us through the first steps of first-time Jewish parents. Joseph and Mary take Jesus to be circumcised on the 8th day at the temple. Then according to the Mosaic law in Lev. 12, they have to bring a sacrifice after Mary’s 40 days of purification.

They are not from Jerusalem. They are rural people. They’re from Newboyne, you know just south of Highway 15 between Portland and Lombardy and now they have to go to Ottawa on their own. The Nazareths of the world. This is all new let alone being the parents of the Messiah, the Saviour and future king of the world – no pressure here!

When they come to the crowded courts at the temple, hustling and bustling with people. Where do I go to bring the sacrifice? Who do I pay the redemption price to? ‘Joseph, you got a good grip on Jesus, don’t you?’ They don’t have a ten-year plan from God outlining where, when, and how to raise the Son of God. They are flying by the seat of their pants – better, they are walking by the guidance of the Spirit of God. And as we’ve seen so far in our Christmas series, the Spirit of God has been instrumental in bringing about God’s plans regarding His Son.

The Spirit of God uses seniors to come alongside Joseph and Mary to be God’s presence to comfort them and guide them as they walk by faith in God. The Spirit of God is the presence of God in our life. When we accepted Jesus as our Saviour the Spirit of God came to dwell in us. Each one of us is to be the presence of God for each other when we are walking by faith and walking in step with the Holy Spirit. Which, Simeon and Anna were. And God assures Joseph and Mary of His presence in their life through these two obedient seniors who believe God still has a purpose for them.

God has a purpose for all of us in community. We need each other. We need the passion and strength of youth with the wisdom and patience of maturity. And when we lean on each other God can

do some amazing things. We can all be God's presence for each other if we're living by faith and making ourselves available.

What do we learn from old Simeon how to make ourselves available to others for God's purposes? God uses Simeon to

Confidently Reassure Others in God's Promises **(2:25-35)**

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 upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

A righteous and devout man named Simeon believed God's promises concerning the Messiah, was faithfully looking for the consolation of Israel (the coming of the Messiah who would console/comfort/ bring hope to Israel), was moved by the Holy Spirit to go to the temple at this very time.

"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit"

is worded in such a way that the Spirit reminded him more than once. How, we are not told. Now the day had come when Simeon was moved by the Spirit to go to the temple courts. Again we're not told how the Spirit did that but it's not unlike the Spirit to impress upon our hearts a godly desire at an unusual time that we feel compelled to follow. Or he places the thought in his mind and our minds 'out-of-the-blue' and we respond by faith and then we find out why.

Like Simeon, we need to be spiritually ready to be used to come alongside each other and reassure us of God's promises and work in or life. Maybe you're thinking, I'm not that kind of person. I'm not the encouraging type ... I'm not mature enough ... I'm not – exactly; YOU'RE NOT. But

We have the Holy Spirit (vv.25-27)

And He specializes in working in us through our 'I'm nots' so people can see God in us. The presence of God dwells in us now that we accepted Christ as our Saviour. We have to allow Him to shine through our inabilities and by faith obey His Word and His leading to be what we're not and be more like Jesus who He's conforming us to be. Most of our "I'm not ..." excuses are just that; excuses to disguise our unwillingness not our inabilities. I think we forget that we will be held accountable for how we lived and "each one will receive what is due him, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10)

The "Spirit came upon" Simeon describes how he worked prior to Pentecost. Jesus said that after He rose from the dead, He would send the Holy Spirit to be in us. We have an advantage over Simeon. When we believe Jesus' death paid for our sins, accepting Him as Lord and Saviour then Paul says in Eph. 1:13-14 we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Paul also called this the baptism of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 12:13, (past tense; baptism means complete immersion, so we got all the Spirit) .

Simeon had been growing spiritually for many years. So he sensed God's Spirit leading him to Joseph and Mary that day. What did the Spirit do then when Simeon obeyed?

He enables us to speak Words of hope (vv.28-32)

Simeon had been looking (consistently) for the Messiah and anticipating what Jesus' coming will mean. Like Simeon we don't know the when of His coming but we know what it will mean: hope and salvation. And he sings words of hope that become part of the Word of God:

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."

Joseph and Mary are amazed by Simeon's encouraging words! Affirming what they already knew but needed to hear again for sure. Because we always need to be reaffirmed in what we believe. It's good to hear God's Words from each other. Joseph and Mary both had Gabriel visits. The birth itself wasn't unordinary but there was the visit from the shepherds. And now Simeon reaffirms what Jesus will do, provide salvation and hope to both Jew & Gentile, just as God promised through Abraham. And Simeon uses Scripture to reassure Joseph and Mary, yep this is the One God promised. He quotes or makes references to Is. 49:6, 42:6 and 52:10. All of which are from the Servant Songs of Isaiah, specific prophecies about the Messiah.

The more we are in the Word ourselves, the more confident we will be of it and be able to share that with one another. And the better prepared we will be when the Spirit prompts us to encourage one another with words from God especially about His promises that haven't been completely fulfilled yet. The more familiar we are with God's truths and presence in our life the more stable we will be when life doesn't look anything like what God has promised. Or when we're surrounded at work, at school, where we live and sometimes even at home by ...

Those who reject Jesus (vv.33-35)

Simeon is not done yet is he?

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."

Isaiah also prophesied that Jesus would be a stone that the builders of Israel would stumble over (8:12-15). Many would fall away by rejecting Him as Messiah while others will rise to God in faith believing in Him. Everyone in the world must answer the question Jesus asked His disciples? "Who do you say I am?" Jesus Himself said some disconcerting words:

Mary's soul would be pierced by experiencing the pain of seeing her son die. Jesus had to suffer for the sins of the world for salvation to be available to us.

Matt. 10:34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' ³⁷ "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

Not intentionally but by the sheer fact that one accepts Him in the same household while others do not. The fact that faith in Jesus separates people so starkly tells us this is life and death. It's just a preference like you like Starbucks and your brother likes Tim Horton's – this is a spiritual battle between good and evil, the battle for your soul. And Satan is a sore loser.

Before Joseph and Mary have time to dwell on this, God sends another senior, Anna, a prophetess who lived in the temple itself, seemingly since she became a widow about 60 years prior or more.

She never left the temple but worshiped 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.

At that very moment when Simeon spoke hard but true words, she gives thanks to God for the child gives them hope filled words about what Jesus will ultimately do; redeem the nation. We need to be the Simeon and Anna's in each other's lives

Encourage One Another to Persevere in Hope **(2:36-38)**

V.38 says Anna came up to them *“at that very moment”*. Which tells us she responded to God's Spirit prompting her to go to this couple with this new baby and encourage them with words from God. What we underestimate is we don't know where she was when she was prompted. The Court of Gentiles and the Court of Women (the only two places they could have been) were huge and constantly busy. God's Spirit nudges elderly, obedient Anna who maybe doesn't move to quickly, possibly nudging her 5/10/15/20 minutes prior, and she has to make her way towards Joseph, Mary, Jesus and Simeon and God arranges through her obedience to say words that they need to hear at just the right moment. Simeon's final words were foreboding indicating that Joseph and Mary's journey with Jesus will be difficult and they will need to persevere. And if you and I are going to encourage one another to persevere and hang in there with God when life gets challenging, we'll be most useful

If we're persevering ourselves (vv.36-37)

Like the Anna's who love God, get married and 7 years later she's a widow. Why God, she probably asked many times but she didn't quit on God. She didn't remarry. Did she have children? We don't know. Life did not go as she hoped it would but she didn't give up her hope in God because our earthly lives will never go as we'd like because the world is marred with sin and so are we. Whether she actually lived at the temple is unclear but she came every day.

She was a prophetess, one who told people God's truths. She was used by God to encourage others with God's words. She was from the tribe of Asher – that's nice. Why are we told that? Because there's a misconception that many people have had for hundreds of years – even today – that 10 tribes of Israel of Israel were lost after the Assyrian exile. Malarky! Some of them lost proof of their lineage – we see that in Ezra 3 – but the Anna's and many others were not lost. Anna is the same as Hannah, meaning grace. God in His grace has many people exactly where they need to be who make themselves available by putting God's plans ahead of their desires (note the many fastings she did) so that they could be used of God to share His words to encourage others. That's why God saved you and me. And like Anna, we need to walk with God so that we will

Be sensitive to God's leading towards others (v.38a)

Think of Anna. She's old, looking towards finishing her life soon no doubt. She's from the most northwestern tribe of Israel, way up on the east coast of the Mediterranean bordering Lebanon. We read of almost no one of any notoriety from the tribe of Asher, except Anna. And when she comes up

to them she gives thanks to God. And this word for give thanks is not the usual words for giving thanks but it means she gave assent to God's words or promise. She assured Joseph and Mary that, yes this is the one God promised. God arranges for two more witnesses to assure Joseph and Mary at the same time this is Jesus the Saviour of the world.

she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna didn't stop giving thanks to God just to Joseph and Mary. She told others also! Which is what we're to do:

Remind each other of God's truths (v.38b)

She told those who also were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem; fellow believers and at least God-fearing people. Reminding them that Jesus is on His way and God's promises are really, really true. There is a day coming when God will fulfill His promises to believing Israel and believing Gentiles and all our fears and worries will be no more.

We would do well to learn from older saints; people like Simeon and Anna who never stop growing spiritually, who look forward more than backwards, who live by faith more than the flesh and loved talking about Jesus and the promises of God. And if you're thinking "I'd like to be like Simeon and Anna someday", then start today. We can't be something in the future that we're not working on today.

I imagine most of you if not all of you will have this conversation with a family member or think to yourself on your way home or later today, 'Wasn't it good to see so and so?' Or 'I had a good chat with so-and-so after church and they were telling me about ...' or 'Isn't it wonderful to see that family with their kids ...' Right? Here's the thing: if you are encouraged by seeing or visiting with someone today I can guarantee someone said the same about you. You encouraged someone today just by being here. Why? Because the Spirit of God dwells in you and you were God's presence to someone else. Maybe you shared a promise of God or a reminder of His truth to someone who needed to hear it. Maybe you shared a struggle you were having a someone else was equally encouraged because they were going through something similar. Or maybe you older saints shared with someone younger that God will get you through that, or that He is faithful as you've seen over the years.

When we know the Lord and have His presence dwelling in us, others can be consoled and reassured of God's presence with them by our words that come from His Word. Don't wait to be a Simeon or an Anna; be that kind of encourager today.

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If you have any questions or comments please contact us at olivett@rideau.net