



PONDERING A
TREASURE

4TH WEEK OF
ADVENT

LUKE 2:22-38

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said 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, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that 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 his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

DAY 1

LUKE 2:22-24

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

Few modes of transportation require more hoops to jump through than air travel. The dizzying process of check-in, security, boarding, deplaning, customs, and baggage claim almost has a ritual-like quality to it that just hits differently than a long road trip. Though every step has purpose, it can be difficult to appreciate that when lines are long and time is tight.

Like the ritual of air travel, Mary and Joseph are at the point in their journey where they have various hoops to jump through. After bearing a firstborn son, in addition to circumcision (Luke 2:21), the Mosaic Law required a process of purification for the mother followed by consecration of the child (see Exodus 13; Leviticus 12; Numbers 18). In verses 22-24, we see the author blending these different events. We are reminded twice here, and once more in verse 39, that Joseph and Mary performed everything according to the Law of the Lord.

Mary’s body is weak from pregnancy and childbirth. As for Joseph, he is trying to provide for his family, which grew faster than he ever anticipated. Yet there is no sign from the narrative that they partake in these rituals begrudgingly.

In our modern culture of privilege and entitlement, it’s hard to imagine how these parents of the King of the universe would have to submit to these mundane rituals. Furthermore, they were so poor that they could not afford the prescribed sacrifice of a lamb and instead sacrificed the lowly, affordable alternative. There was no diamond medallion status VIP line for Mary, even as she held the darling of heaven himself.

The true wonder in this scene, however, is even greater than the juxtaposition of Mary’s need for purification versus Jesus’s perfect purity and Joseph’s poverty versus Jesus’s heavenly inheritance. As we continue on the story, we see yet again how God surprises us with providential moments that add layers of purpose and wonder. Old Simeon waits to meet them and greets the Christ-child with a Spirit-filled explosion of joy. They hear yet again how their son will fulfill the Abrahamic Promise and will be a light of salvation for all people. And Mary is warned that it will come at a dire cost, resulting in a wound to her own soul as well.

As we wait in these last few days of Advent, let this passage be a reminder of the mundane rhythms of our walk with the Lord—their purpose and ritual, both ordinary and holy. It is in these moments that we encounter the Simeons and Annas that unexpectedly shine a bright light on God's redeeming grace. And, one day, perhaps in a moment so ordinary, Jesus will be presented to us yet again

PRAYER

Father in heaven, we are in awe of the irony in your story. Thank you that these are reminders that you stand in absolute solidarity with the tensions that we live with in this world. O God, help us to see this moment in light of your providence that we may be filled with a humble and grateful obedience. Thank you for the gift of your son that mercifully restores us to fullness and wholeness. Strengthen us to hope in him today. Amen.

~ Masakuni Hotta

DAY 2

LUKE 2:25-26

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

'Tis the season for waiting. Some children are waiting to open gifts and see family members. Many parents are waiting for some time off from work. All of us are waiting on something. Have you ever thought about what it means to wait for something? One thing it means is that something, whatever it is you are waiting on, is constantly on your mind. And yet you are continually reminded—or you're reminding yourself—that it is not time yet. Amidst this seesawing of emotions, your daily life continues on. This is what it was like for Simeon.

In one of the most remarkable parts of Mary's story, Simeon, "a righteous and devout" man from Jerusalem, meets Mary's family at the temple. Like all of Israel, Simeon was waiting on the Messiah to come and restore the nation—to overthrow the ruling party and finalize God's plan on earth. Simeon had a confidence that he would see the Messiah in his lifetime, for the Spirit told him such. This means Simeon had to wait.

Two remarkable aspects of this narrative have stayed with me. First, amidst his lifetime of waiting, Simeon was still seen as a righteous and devout man. Oftentimes, when I have to wait for something I am anticipating, my mood and attitude change. My words can be harsh, cutting, and ice cold. My temper gets short, and I seem on edge. If there were a line to describe me, I'm not sure it would say "righteous and devout." Yet that is exactly how the text helps us remember Simeon. In his waiting, he was probably patient, kind, showing love and mercy while still putting his hope in the Messiah. The second thing that really sticks out to me is Simeon's trust in God's plan. God had a plan, and he communicated that plan through his prophets and through history. Simeon believed that plan and trusted fully in God. So often when we are meant to wait—meant to be reminded that perhaps "not now" is the answer to our prayers—it can lead to doubt and a second-guessing of God. Not for Simeon. He knew, with confidence, he would see the Messiah. He trusted in God. He believed Jesus would come one day to introduce the Kingdom.

Simeon's story in the temple is such a great reminder of the truths of Advent. We are called to not only look back on the birth of Jesus but to sit in anticipation—a long waiting—for the coming of Jesus Christ again. Eugene Peterson describes it as "a long obedience in the same direction." That direction is toward the Messiah, the King, and it calls for our whole trust in God and his plan, even when we have to wait a lifetime.

PRAYER

Oh good and gracious Father, like Simeon, we are called to wait. To wait for the second coming of Jesus the Messiah and the consummation of all things. Give us patience, hope, and an ability to trust you and your good plan. And while we wait for Jesus, we are called to wait on many other aspects in our lives too. Would you give us the strength, patience, peace, and understanding to wait. In our waiting, we place our hope in you and in our King, Jesus. In His name, we pray. Amen.

~ Addison Hawkins

DAY 3

LUKE 2:27-32

²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation
³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Unlike most of the residents of Jerusalem, Simeon had the right idea about the expectation of the Messiah. His recorded words in Luke 2 reveal he understood the most important elements of the promises to Abraham and other Old Testament prophecies. He understood that a major role of Israel was to bring God’s revelation to the rest of the world beyond Israel and that the promises of scripture were to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. He had been eagerly awaiting the coming of the Messiah and the deliverance of Israel, but he was also well-acquainted with the rest of God’s plan for the whole world. He understood that Israel had the great opportunity to bring God’s glory to people beyond Israel’s borders and knew what a good thing that was. He knew God would be glorified in the role Israel played in the plan.

It is hard to imagine someone spending a huge portion of their life contemplating these kinds of things, but that does seem to be what Simeon did. During that life and contemplation process, he clearly had developed a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. That relationship must have developed out of familiarity with scripture and prayer. He studied the prophecies about the Messiah that were throughout the Old Testament. He must have known them by heart. They shaped his thinking and his expectations.

Every day, he must have woken up wondering if this would be the day he would see the Messiah. It must have been comforting for him to know that the Spirit had revealed to him that he wouldn’t die until he had seen the Messiah. The text further says the Holy Spirit was upon him that day in the Luke 2 narrative and that it led him to the temple when Mary and Joseph were present. His excitement was boundless after a lifetime of waiting. The moment he saw Jesus, he understood who the baby was in a way that no one else on earth could, except for the prophetess Anna.

It looks like Mary and Joseph sort of knew what was going on with Jesus, but Simeon expanded their understanding with his prophecy about Jesus and his blessing. It likely was all more complicated and involved than they expected. This experience must have forced them to pray more for understanding and to go back to the Old Testament prophecies to get an accurate picture of the Messiah and learn more about what they should expect. They must have had conversations that went beyond the thinking of everyone they knew. They had to try to sort out the good and glorious things they heard from the downright scary. Fortunately, they both had a faith that transcended their circumstances, and they had the Holy Spirit to comfort them and steer their thinking as they contemplated the scriptures.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for Simeon and the role he played in Jesus' early life and with Mary and Joseph. Thank you for his understanding of and dedication to your plan. Thank you for his patience in waiting a lifetime to see the Messiah. May his example challenge us to immerse ourselves in scripture in order to understand the full extent of your plans. Help us to be patient in these times, when it seems like so much is falling apart. Remind us daily as we watch the news and see tragedies unfold that you are in charge of it all and will bring history to your planned conclusion.

~ Richard Malone

DAY 4

LUKE 2:33-35

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And so here is where things get a little interesting! If you have been following along over the last several days (or even weeks), you know that Gabriel has announced that Mary would bear the Messiah. This news was confirmed in a visit to Elizabeth and in the visit from the shepherds. So now, according to tradition, Joseph and Mary go to Jerusalem to present Jesus for circumcision and for Mary to undergo purification rituals. It is in Jerusalem, amidst the hubbub of people, that Joseph and Mary are intercepted by old Simeon. As we saw yesterday, things start out well. Simeon gushes about the child, calling him the glory of Israel. But then ...

His tone changes. Now, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he speaks in a way to make plain that while Jesus is The One, his ministry will not be completely as Joseph and Mary expect. Simeon proclaims that while Jesus has been appointed for the rising of many, he will also be the occasion for the falling of many. And that Mary herself will have her soul pierced as if by a sword.

Imagine getting that word as a young mother. Your baby is going to be the center of many falling and—by the way—a sword will pierce your soul. Not exactly gushing praise. Standing a couple of thousand years away, we see things more clearly and understand a little of what Simeon was talking about. But Mary experiences these things without the benefit of the whole story. What must she have been thinking? We know she is a ponderer. Could she have known about the controversy that would surround her son? Could she have foreseen the worry that she would have that he was out of his mind? Could she have possibly grasped a trial, an execution, or an early death? A sword will pierce your soul.

Mary's journey is indeed filled with twists, turns, and difficulties. It is a journey that reaches its zenith at the cross, finds its way through the open tomb, and ultimately sees her seated with the disciples to carry on the mission of her son. It is a journey that encompasses grief and hard things. Her own son would say, “If anyone would come after me, let him . . . take up his cross and follow me.” A sword will pierce your own soul, comes as a shock and may not fit with the American dream, but it is the Gospel way.

I am sure in her ponderings that Mary at some point recognized that the ultimate beauty of this proclamation came not in the hardship of own soul-piercing, but in the reality of her son's piercing. These words of Isaiah sum it up nicely: But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Is. 53:5)

As we said above, this is, after all, the Gospel way. A way in which the exalted are humbled, the humbled are exalted, gaining your life means losing it, but in losing your life, you will find it.

PRAYER

Lord, help us along the way to bring our own soul piercings and find them bound up and healed in your ultimate sacrifice. May we never forget that our journey of faith is one of the cross. But may we never forget that you have led the way. Thank You. In Jesus's name. Amen.

~ Andrew VanderMaas

DAY 5

LUKE 2:36-38

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

What are you waiting for? *Waiting*. That word is so linked to the season of advent: *waiting... waiting... waiting. How long, O Lord?* (Psalm 13) *Waiting... waiting*. What are you waiting for in the deepest part of your soul?

In today's passage, we see there were those at that time who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem! And in this moment, they heard the shocking, great news: this poor, little infant was the beginning of the end of the waiting. What an appropriate passage for us to read today on this Christmas Day!

Ultimately all of our waiting can be traced back to that same longing: the redemption of Jerusalem. We know deeply that this world is broken, and we long for it to be made right. Romans 8:18-25 speaks to this:

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Anna had built a life around actively waiting. It was her posture for decades. She didn't leave the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. She responded to the pain of being a very young widow by putting herself in a place where she could wait and see. She was waiting with expectation.

We don't have a quote from this woman who is called a prophetess, but by her being described in this way it gives us an idea of her focus. In an article from The Gospel Coalition entitled "What Does Scripture Teach About the Office of Prophet and Gift of Prophecy?," author Sam Storms says

Prophecy is the human report of a divine revelation. . . . [A]ll true prophecy bears witness to Jesus Christ. Prophetic revelation is not only rooted in the gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; its ultimate aim or primary focus is also to bear witness to the person of the incarnate Christ. Prophecy, therefore, is fundamentally Christ-centered.

Anna's faith became sight.

Each name mentioned was important. The name *Anna* (also translated Hannah), means favor, or grace, and reminds us immediately of Samuel's mother. That famous Hannah had also prayed in the temple and later presented her son to the Lord there. Her son became a prophet. Now Mary was presenting her son in the temple. Eli blessed Samuel; Simeon blessed Jesus. So many associations. The name of Anna's father was *Phanuel*, which means "face of God." How amazing to be the daughter of Face-of-God who late in life sees the actual face of God. No wonder she gave thanks to God in the presence of all around her! Finally, the fact that Anna was from the tribe of Asher is very significant. Asher, one of northern tribes that had been conquered by Assyria, became known as one of the lost tribes. But, what once was lost was found. See Jeremiah 23:5-8 to see the promise that the northern tribes would be led home by a righteous Branch.

How powerful are these three verses in scripture, with just enough detail to reveal all we need to know through Anna, who waited, and saw the face of God. So merry Christmas to those who wait! May hope, peace, joy, and love be yours this day. With Anna, let's give thanks. Let's rejoice, speak, and sing to those who are waiting for the redemption of this world, even if that's not exactly how they would say it. And, if you enjoy searching up the mysteries of language, look this one up: there is an archaic term used for bands of musicians who went around singing Christmas carols on the streets of towns. They were called Waits.

PRAYER

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. We wait for you; we see you; we wait again; we see again. We worship you today, Jesus, and give thanks that you came to redeem us. Happy birthday. Amen.

~ linda Bokma-deJong and Susan Guerra