

## The Majesty of God Revealed To Simeon and Anna

This morning we are going to talk about “waiting.” Our message series this Advent season is: *The Majesty of God Revealed*. We have explored *The Majesty of God Revealed to the Prophets*, *The Majesty of God Revealed to Mary and Joseph*, and now today, *The Majesty of God Revealed to Simeon and Anna*. Their stories are all about waiting.

We have to journey to the other side of the Christ-Child’s birth narrative. Forty days after Jesus’ birth, Mary and Joseph take their baby and travel five miles north to Jerusalem. Here they will perform two acts of obedience to the Old Testament law.

According to the Law, the firstborn, human or animal, was sacred to God. In recognition of God’s gracious giving of life, this one was set aside for God’s use. Look at this from the Old Testament book of Numbers:

Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Now behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine.” – *Numbers 3:11-12*

God set aside an entire tribe of the Israelites to serve him. Since they performed all the Temple duties instead of the firstborn, the parents of firstborn non-Levites were required to pay a redemption fee. Here are the instructions given to Aaron, the head of the Levitical priests, from Numbers 18:

Every first issue of the womb of all flesh, whether man or animal, which they offer to the LORD, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. As to their redemption price, from a month old you shall redeem them, by your valuation, five shekels in silver.... – *Numbers 18:15-16*

In the redemption ceremony, the father brought the child to a priest. The mother was not obligated to attend, but often did so. The priest held the child while the father gave the priest five silver shekels in place of his son. The priest then returned the child to the father. Just a side note here: think about this.

Isn’t it ironic that the one who would be the Redeemer and the one whose personal sacrifice would be the price of redemption for our souls, should also be “redeemed”

according to the Law. Incredible symbolism as Jesus became identified with those he came to save!

The Law also declared that after a woman gave birth she could not enter the Temple for 40 days if the child was a boy or eighty days if the child was a girl. She also could not participate in any religious ceremony during this time. At the end of this period, she had to bring to the Temple a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon for a sin offering.

If she could not afford the lamb, she was allowed to bring another pigeon. This became known as the offering of the poor, which is what Mary and Joseph brought. This is further evidence that the magi have not yet found their way to Bethlehem. With gold, frankincense and myrrh, Mary and Joseph would not be giving the offering of the poor.

While at the Temple, Mary and Joseph have two encounters that affirm the unique identity of their child and point to his majesty as Messiah, God's eternal Son.

The first encounter is with a man named Simeon. We don't know much about him. He is an elderly gentleman. He has seen a lot of history happen to his beloved Israel. He was probably just a boy when the Roman Empire took control of Palestine – some 60 years before. He has lived through some very difficult days for his nation. And yet, with all that, he is a man of hope. Turn in your Bible to the Gospel of Luke, chapter two.

### **Luke 2:25-35**

Luke says that Simeon was a righteous man. It means that he was in right standing before God. He was also devout. W.E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says about this word that it means “careful as to the realization of the presence and claims of God, reverencing God, pious...”

These two things suggest that Simeon was a man who trusted God to bring about what Israel was in such desperate need of. It also shows a man who had a deep reverence for God. That's probably why a third characteristic is evident: Simeon was influenced by the Holy Spirit – there was a receptivity to spiritual things, to the things of God. God chose to reveal his majesty to this spiritually-attuned man.

With the assurance of God that he would see the Christ, Simeon must have gone to the Temple each day, full assured that God would fulfill his promise. I suspect that his days were filled with prayer, while expecting and waiting. No doubt he thought much on what God had revealed to him.

How long before he had been given this hope, we are not told. I suspect it had been some lengthy time. In hoping, Simeon exercised believing faith. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews puts it this way:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen.  
– *Hebrews 11:1*

This is why we know that God was pleased with Simeon. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say:

And without faith it is impossible to please [God], for the one who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. –  
*Hebrews 11:6*

Simeon was confidently hoping. What was he hoping for? – the consolation of Israel – the comfort, the relief, that the Messiah would bring to his people. The words of the prophet Isaiah must have been often on his mind:

“Comfort, O Comfort My people,” says your God. “Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” – *Isaiah 40:1-2*

Simeon was expectant. Expectancy is a powerful thing. It must surely have been a part of the life of the German priest who was asked why he always removed his hat when he gave catechism to the children of lowly coal miners. The priest answered that he never knew who might be among those children; one might change the world. His most famous student? – Martin Luther.

Simeon waited reverently – God gave the promise; God would have to deliver. As each year passed, the temptation must have been present to doubt God. But he did not give up or lose hope. Here is where you need to act on faith.

How often Simeon appeared in the Temple, eyes searching the crowd – looking with eyes of faith. I wonder how often Simeon said to himself: “Is this the one?”

Simeon waited receptively – when God said: “This is the one,” he was ready to receive the message, ready to respond. There was a spiritual receptivity – his spiritual ears were ready to hear.

Simeon waited obediently – when the Holy Spirit pointed to the Messiah, Simeon was ready to act; his waiting now required obedience.

Luke tells us that Simeon blessed God. That word means “to speak well of, to eulogize.” Simeon must have been overwhelmed with gratitude and praise to God for his faithfulness to the promise he had made.

Finally, Simeon accepts his release. He is saying to the Lord, “My life is complete, fulfilled; now I am ready to die.” The gift of the Christ, promised so long ago, was present. He was there! That was enough for Simeon.

In his blessing, he reflects on the majesty of God revealed to him about the Christ. Look at verses 30-32 again.

### **Luke 2:30-32**

I wonder what the people around Simeon thought as he declared that God’s majesty as revealed in the Christ and his mission was not just for Israel but indeed the whole world. It shouldn’t have surprised those knowledgeable of the Old Testament Scriptures, and yet we see over and over again how God’s chosen people missed the Chosen One.

Simeon looked forward with eager anticipation. There must have been a stirring in his heart and mind each day as he awakened, wondering: “Is this the day?” Simeon arranged his life – purpose, focus, anticipation, expectation – all around that first coming of the Christ.

There was another person whom Mary and Joseph encountered when in Jerusalem. A woman named Anna.

### **Luke 2:36-38**

Biblical scholars differ in this rendering. Many believe that the text more accurately reads that she was a widow for 84 years. Add the 84 to the seven years married and add perhaps 13 years – the age at which she probably married, and you see that Anna was perhaps 104 years old.

As to what she was praying for, I would guess that it was for the consolation of Israel – similar to Simeon. She would have known of the promises of the coming Messiah from the Hebrew Scriptures. And she was waiting for God to favor his people with the promised Christ. God gave her recognition that this child brought by Mary and Joseph was the Promised One – the Redeemer of Israel. And she began to speak about him.

Again, you have to wonder what those around her must have thought. And even the impact this would have had on Mary and Joseph.

Two people to whom God had revealed his majesty. Two people who waited to see in fulfillment what God had revealed to them.

So, what about you and me this morning? What can we take away from the experiences of Simeon and Anna? Let me answer that question with three other questions: What should we wait for? How should we wait? And, why should we wait?

1) “What should we wait for?” Let me suggest you consider three things:

- For Jesus to show up at Christmas. As we get older, the danger is that we become very jaded about Christmas. It is so “ho-hum.” Can we recapture the wonder of Christmas we see in the faces of children as they await Christmas morning? Across the country road – Otto & Bernie: nativity set.

Or picture a child standing before a Christmas tree – looking in wonder and awe, transfixed by the beauty and wonder of it all. Oh, that we, as adults, could recapture that wonder of the Christ-child in your own lives. William Quayle, American bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century wrote:

When wonder is dead, the soul becomes a dry bone.

- For Jesus to show up a second time. Jesus has come. We no longer await his coming for redemption. But there is another coming. This coming will be in two stages. First, he will come to receive those who believe in him. These he will take into heaven to be with him forever. This is called the rapture of the church.

The second stage is that of judgment, not redemption. He will come with his mighty angels to destroy the power of the evil one, to set up his kingdom on earth, and to establish justice and righteousness.

We are to eagerly look forward to his coming in glory to receive the church – all those who have put their trust in him for salvation. This reality, this certainty, should be the focus upon which we arrange our lives: our purpose, our focus and anticipation and expectation.

The Apostle Paul had this in mind when he penned these words to Titus:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works. – *Titus 2:11-14*

The third thought I have is this:

- For Jesus to show up today. For some of you, this is a desperate need. You are faced with circumstances in life, whether difficulty or loss or discouragement. Forget about the future; you are waiting for Jesus to show up in the present.

God's promises stand firm for you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. His peace is available to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Nothing can separate you from the love of God found in his Son Jesus. God will cause everything, I repeat "everything," in your life to work together for your ultimate good and his glory. That is because you are God's child and he is committed to work out his perfect plan in your life, a plan that even allows for the difficulties you are facing.

I love this passage from Psalm 27. It comes from the hand of King David, who surely knew trouble and difficulty. From the New American Standard Version:

I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD. – *Psalm 27:13-14*

2) Question two: "How should we wait?"

We see in the experience of Simeon and Anna an example for us on how to wait. First of all, we should wait expectantly. This counteracts the tendency towards doubt. I wonder how tempted they were to doubt. To doubt what God had revealed to them. To doubt whether or not God would deliver. To doubt whether they even heard God correctly. To doubt whether they could hang in there or not. They weren't getting any younger.

Someone has suggested that we should learn to doubt our doubts more than we doubt our faith. This is a choice we make – to wait expectantly for God to show up, to work in our lives, to provide for our needs, to bring comfort and encouragement when we so desperately need to experience his grace, his peace, his love, his presence.

We should also wait actively. Simeon and Anna were active in their waiting. Every day, they looked. Every day, they anticipated. Every day, they expected. Is that the spirit you have as you wait for God to show up, to work?

Waiting actively counteracts the tendency towards being disengaged. We would be thinking wrongly if we equate waiting with doing nothing. In the language of the Old Testament, “waiting for the Lord” is very much akin to “hoping in the Lord.”

Would you turn in your Bible back to the Psalms – Psalm 130? This is one of the psalms called “A Song of Ascents.” These psalms were sung by the Hebrew people as they made their way up to Jerusalem to celebrate the great feasts that God had instructed them to observe.

### **Psalm 130:5-7**

About the meaning of the word “hope,” Eugene Peterson writes:

Hoping does not mean doing nothing. It is not fatalistic resignation. It means going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions. It is not compelled to work away at keeping up appearances with a bogus spirituality. It is the opposite of desperate and panicky manipulations, of scurrying and worrying. And hoping is not dreaming. It is not spinning an illusion or fantasy to protect us from our boredom or our pain. It means a confident, alert expectation that God will do what he said he would do. It is imagination put in the harness of faith.

This is what is involved in waiting on the Lord. Simeon and Anna were very active in their waiting for the fullness of God’s revelation to them. This is the attitude we are to have. So that even when we do not understand the “why” of our situation – while we wait for God to show up – we know the One who knows the ultimate “why” in our life. It is a confident, active expectation that we will see God work in his way, in his time.

It doesn’t make it easier; it makes it bearable. I don’t think it was easy for Simeon and Anna, day after day, to carry on with life, all the while waiting for God to show up. Don’t you think they took a little grief from their family and friends, even probably from the religious leaders at the Temple?

3) The third question: “Why should we wait?”

The answer to this question is tied to the very character of God. God is faithful to keep his promise. Simeon and Anna tied their hopes to the fact that God had

promised; they believed he would deliver on that promise. There wasn't any other evidence that I am aware of that provided this confident expectation. They simply clung to God's faithfulness.

When you find yourself in the situation of waiting for God to show up, you wait because you believe God will be true to his Word. Sometimes there is no other evidence that change is coming, that relief is coming, that deliverance is coming. But you put your trust in God and in his promises to be near to you, to walk with you through any and every circumstance of life, to provide his peace, his presence, his power to persevere.

Someone has said: "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on." The knot is the promises of God, and on the other end of the rope, perhaps the only thing keeping from you falling into despair and discouragement stands God, the Creator of all the galaxies, the Savior of your soul, the Father who loves you dearly and is bound by his very oath to work his good for you with a view to eternity.