

Service 27 December 2020

In the story of Jesus' purification rites, two older characters, Simeon and Anna, make their mark. We focus on Simeon's obedience to God and Anna's evangelism.

Preparation

You may like to do this before the service begins. Take a plain piece of paper big enough that you can place one hand on it and draw round your hand. Then cut out the shape of your hand. We will use this later.

Hymn **(StF) 229** only the tune will be played. If you have a tune book it might be handy.

Call to worship

We begin with words from today's Bible reading when Mary and Joseph take Jesus as a baby is to the Temple and there they meet Simeon and Anna:

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'

Carol (StF) 206

Being only two days after Christmas we will continue to sing some carols. The first is, "It was on a starry night when the hills were bright".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeRrAzapOQ0&t=2s>

It was on a starry night when the hills were bright,
earth lay sleeping, sleeping calm and still;
then in a cattle shed, in a manger bed
a boy was born, King of all the world.

*And all the angels sang for Him,
the bells of heaven rang for Him;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.
And all the angels sang for Him,
the bells of heaven rang for Him;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.*

Soon the shepherds came that way, where the baby lay;
and were kneeling, kneeling by His side.
And their hearts believed again for the peace of men
For a boy was born, King of all the world.

*And all the angels sang for Him,
the bells of heaven rang for Him;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.
And all the angels sang for Him,
the bells of heaven rang for Him;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.*

Joy Webb

Prayer

Lord, as we celebrate your coming to earth, born a baby just as we are, we praise and thank you that you were willing to lose your life for our sakes, so that all sins might be forgiven. We are still far from the finished article and despite what you have done for us, we continue to let you down and fail to follow your teachings. Lord, we ask yet again that you will forgive us.

If we confess our sins,
God is faithful and just
and will forgive our sins,
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Children's Activity

An activity sheet was sent out with the notices.

Bible Reading

We will now hear our Bible reading. This will be read to us by _____ .

Luke 2:22-40 (New International Version)

Jesus presented in the temple

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.

Song (StF) 229

This next hymn is specifically about what we have just heard and this is probably the only time of the year it is appropriate to sing it. You will only hear the music for this one. The tune plays all the way through once before we begin to sing. Following the hymn there will be a film version of Simeon's part.

Mary and Joseph
came to the temple
brought the boy Jesus,
offered him there.
People were waiting
wanting to greet him;
long had they sought him,
solace for care.

Anna had prayed there,
widowed, long waiting,
worshiping God by
day and by night.
Now she is praising,
filled with elation:
here is God's promise,
Christ is her light.

Simeon sings now:
God proffers blessing,
brilliantly gilding
dawn of his day.
Light in the darkness,
never extinguished,
Light of all nations,
light up our way.

Andrew Pratt

Simeon

PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SswGxaRo3dw&t=91s>

Reflection 1

There are essentially four sections in this reading. The first and last tell the fulfilment of the requirements under the law given to Moses all those years ago. For this ceremony Mary and Joseph made their way from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. This was presumably Jesus' first visit to the Temple.

Most depictions of Jesus' presentation at the Temple show an empty temple apart from the participants in the story, but other sources suggest that it was a busy place. That is why I chose to show that particular video clip. It also highlights that Simeon's final words appear to be addressed to Mary alone.

The interesting bits are the contributions made by the old folks in the middle, Simeon and Anna. First Simeon.

We aren't actually told he is old but it usually seems to be assumed that he was. That being the case we aren't told either when the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before he died. He may have been waiting a long time, and wondering if God's promise would ever be fulfilled, perhaps like others before him, even back to the father of the nation, Abraham.

However, we should be mindful that God's timetable is not ours. At this stage the Messiah is a new-born baby. It will be another 30 years before his ministry begins.

If the powers that be had known that at the time they would probably have been somewhat underwhelmed to say the least. Even when they did find out they were not best pleased as Simeon's comments to Mary bore out.

But, of course, the lesson here is that God always honours his promises.

This coming week is a time people traditionally make their new year's resolutions—promises to ourselves. How long do we keep them up?

But let us remember God always keeps his.

Carols

We are going to sing a couple of carols, first a traditional Polish carol relating to the shepherds and the second a traditional Welsh carol relating to the wise men, the first verse of which is in Welsh. These carols are followed by an animation of Anna's part in the story.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Q_nyGKcwP4

Infant holy,
infant lowly,
for his bed a cattle stall;
oxen lowing,
little knowing
Christ the Babe is Lord of all.
Swiftl are winging
angels singing,
nowells are ringing,
tidings bringing:
Christ the Babe is Lord of all!
Christ the Babe is Lord of all!

Flocks are sleeping;
shepherds keeping
vigil till the morning new
saw the glory,
hear the story,
tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing,
free from sorrow,
praises voicing,
greet the morrow:
Christ the Babe was born for you!
Christ the Babe was born for you!

Polish traditional carol
tr: Edith M. G. Reed

Heather Dale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEyAad28oWA>

All poor men and humble
all lame men who stumble
come, haste ye, nor feel ye afraid
for Jesus, our treasure
with love past all measure
in lowly poor manger was laid.

Then haste we to show him
our praises we owe him
our service he ne'er can despise
whose love still is able
to show us that stable
where softly in manger he lies.

All poor men and humble
all lame men who stumble
come, haste ye, nor feel ye afraid
for Jesus, our treasure
with love past all measure
in lowly poor manger was laid

The wise men who found him
laid rich gifts around him
yet oxen they gave him their hay.
And Jesus in beauty
accepted their duty
contented in a manger he lay
contented in a manger he lay
contented in a manger he lay

Welsh traditional carol

Anna

PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leN-xNrkjbo&t=3s>

Reflection 2

Now let us consider Anna.

I found the clip quite amusing. Luke only gives Anna one paragraph. The first part is her biography. The second part is the important bit.

“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.”

Two things strike me about Anna.

First she gave thanks to God, an example to us all.

Secondly she “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

How many people are looking forward to redemption today?

For the Jewish people then the redemption they were looking forward to was to become a sovereign nation again and be freed from Roman rule.

Heard that before? Sounds a bit like Brexit?

Right now I'm sure we would all like to be freed from Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

But the redemption Anna was speaking of was the redemption Jesus Christ brought us with his death on the cross.

In this respect Anna set us an exemplary example.

May God help us do likewise and bring about the peace spoken about in our next carol, *It came upon the midnight clear*.

Carol (StF) 205

The advantage of leading worship is that I can choose my favourite carols. This one leads us into our prayers of intercession and is sung by the British Methodist Youth Choir.

British Methodist Youth Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLEshi5ijV8&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2vI1CgC3r272G0wvWbn1KW2AwhIH3q42OgBqUBOsIffFTNUQjFmRlqLD8>

(Starts about 1 min in.)

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
`Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King!'
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
with peaceful wings unfurled;
and still their heavenly music
floats o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing;
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have
rolled two thousand years of wrong;
and man, at war with man, hears not
the love-song which they bring.
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
and hear the angels sing!

For lo, the days are hastening on,
to prophets shown of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when the new heaven and earth shall own,
the Prince of Peace their King,
and all the world repeat the song
which now the angels sing.

Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-1876)

Prayers of Intercession

Take a piece of paper and place your hand on it and draw round it. Take a pair of scissors and cut out the profile of your hand. On one side in the palm write, "I thank God for ...". On each finger and the thumb write something you would like to thank God for. On the palm of the other side write, "God hear my prayer for ...". On the fingers and thumb of this side write a prayer concern.

Bringing the prayers together:

Lord, we bring the prayers of your people before you and pray that they may answered and seek that the needs of those mentioned at the beginning of the service may be met. We ask these prayers in the Jesus' name. **Amen.**

We say together the Lord's Prayer:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

Carol (StF) 213

We sing our final carol, *O little town of Bethlehem*, and for those of a certain age the first page is repeated!

Elvis Presley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIA4fFK0akM>

Catshill Baptist Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anRguhFRqUo>

O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King
and peace to all on earth!
For Christ is born of Mary,
and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.

How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still
the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray,
cast out our sin, and enter in,
be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell.
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel.

Blessing

Numbers 6:24-26 (NKJV)

²⁴ “The LORD bless you and keep you;
²⁵ The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.”

Amen.

Keep Covid secure and all the best for 2021!