



The Other Christmas Service

Luke 2:21-40

Waiting? Do you hate waiting for things? I do. It's one of the reasons I don't like flying. It isn't the plane that's important – it's waiting at the airport!

Sometimes you have to be patient for an even longer period – waiting for the Christmas mail for example.

Sometimes waiting is for years – for promotion in a job. Saving up for something really special.

And here was this man Simeon. He had been told by God that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah - the person that God was going to use to rescue his people. We don't know how long he had been waiting but he was getting on a bit.

This evening we are going to have read again some of the great passages from the Christmas story. Almost every person that is in the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke's gospels seem to have been genuinely taken by surprise by what they found out and experience – except Simeon. He wasn't surprised when he saw the baby Jesus and the Holy Spirit identified Him. He had been expecting it a long time.

So who was Simeon? We don't know very much about him other than this:

25 At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him 26 and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. 27 Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple.

Who was he? Just some guy living in Jerusalem. He wasn't a priest, or a rabbi, or a leader. Just some guy – some ordinary guy. And God told him to get down to the Temple.

Jesus again, was revealed to an ordinary person. Not a privileged one, not a special one. Just an ordinary person like you and like me. To God, the ordinary is special and in Christ we are all privileged. And God can use us as he did Simeon. And it wasn't a big task that Simeon waited all his life to do. Just to see a baby, meet His parents and give them a message from God. Simple as that.

I've said this here before and I think it's something the Nativity stories emphasise. Never say or think that you are too simple, or too humble or for that matter too old to be loved by, important to and called to serve God. God chooses ordinary people to do His will because it was to ordinary folk that Jesus came.

But to leave it like that would be a gross simplification. Simeon was more than just a random person. There were things about him that made him useful to God:

◆ **He sought to be close to God**

He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. Because Simeon sought to be close to God, he found that God wanted to be close to him. And he got to know things that had not been revealed to the great and good in Jerusalem – Herod, the king in power or the Pharisees, the dominant religious group of the day or the teachers of the law. When they heard about a king being born, Herod was troubled and all Jerusalem with him (Matt 2). In fact, unlike the shepherds or the wise men, he had a pretty good grasp of what was going on. From looking down at Anna, she was very much the same and there were obviously others in Jerusalem at that time who were like them.

How close are we to God? Whether we are Christians, or just seeking after God, or just interested we have a God who wishes to have an encounter with us. For the other people in the Christmas story, the arrival of

Jesus was a bit of a surprise, even a shock, but not to Simeon.

How near do we feel to God this morning. Near, far, distant? God desires an encounter with us and to do that He was prepared to become human being and live among us and go to a massive amount of personal cost to reach us.

What's keeping you from Jesus this morning if you feel distant? Maybe you don't know Him or anything about it – just ask Him to show Himself to you – to open your eyes to see what He's doing, to open your ears to hear His voice and to give the wisdom you need to follow Him.

◆ **He obeyed the leading of the Holy Spirit**

Most of the people in the Christmas story needed an angel to tell them what was going on. Be that Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men. They needed someone to come and make them listen. Simeon was different – as was Anna for that matter. This is what Luke says of Simeon ***“The Holy Spirit was with him 26 and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah.”*** Here was a man in the Spirit. Someone who had no problem recognising the voice of God. Someone who didn't need a fanfare of angels to sit up and listen to what God was saying. He walked close enough to God to hear the Spirit's prompting and get to the temple. He knew the voice of God and followed what was said it would appear without asking questions. And what he found there was Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus who had just arrived to present Jesus for circumcision.

If we are Christians this morning, let me challenge you with a question: what does it take for us to sit up and listen to God? Do we need an angel – or possibly a whole choir of them? Do we need to hear heavy challenging sermons? Do we need to experience blessing before we'll listen? Do we need to experience tragedy before we'll come to our senses? Or are we sensitive enough to the voice of God to know what His Spirit is saying to us?

God prefers that we were Simeon. But if we're not Simeon then He'll do what it takes for us to hear Him. The sad thing is that many people face all kinds of problems in life and perversely, rather than jumping into the hands of God, they blame Him. Yet God would always prefer we are Simeon, because it is through walking with God that we are able to weather and become stronger as a person and in Him as we face the storms of life.

Lord, give me the eyes to see what you're doing, the ears to hear your Spirit's voice Spirit – and the wisdom to obey you!

◆ **He persevered with the will of God.**

What's interesting about Simeon is he knew exactly what Jesus had come for. That we know because he walked with God and knew His will. As a result of his willingness to be sent by the Spirit, it was his voice God spoke through in the Temple that day. ***28 Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God: 29 “Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. 30 With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: 32 A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel.”***

Mary and Joseph wondered what it was all about - they didn't know the score really. But this guy Simeon had the whole plot. He was close to God and God's mind had been revealed to him. Jesus was to be the saviour of all people, not just Jews, but Gentiles – everybody.

Simeon is the model of the patient man – or for that matter Anna who had walked with God for many long years. Simeon waited on God and for God and God revealed His mind to Him. By Simeon's reaction, it was something he had waited for a long time. The day when Simeon held Jesus in His arms was the most amazing day of his life because he understood the meaning of it all. And he was happy to die from that point on ***Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace.***

God wants us to know the deepest things of His heart. The Bible is also full of promises God makes to us. Promises of blessing. Promises of love. Promises of being closer than a brother. Promises that are eternal. Promises that His Spirit will always be with us.

What He doesn't promise that for the years we are on this earth that we will be exempt from problems, ill-health, disasters, difficult relationships, bad weather, the evil of others. But He does promise that He'll be there and through them we'll grow as people rather than be crushed by them, that we'll prove His presence

and power rather than be discouraged by them. But learning God's time is one of those fundamental things that meant believers struggle with. Simeon knew God's salvation was coming but oh boy – he had to wait!

Are you struggling this morning. Please take the opportunity to talk and pray with someone. It needn't be like that. God doesn't want life to defeat us, or defeat our faith, but through it to find faith, forgiveness, the presence of God and the strength and power to live.

Lord, give me the eyes to see what you're doing, the ears to hear your Spirit's voice and the wisdom to follow you and know your power in my life day by day!

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