

Simeon and Anna

Luke 2:20-38

Waiting. We all do it. It seems we spend half our life waiting. We have waiting rooms, and waiting lines. We wait to be seated, and we wait on the phone to speak to the operator. Sometimes it seems that all we do is wait. Our life is one mad rush to get from one wait to another, from one line to another.

A report from a few years ago said that on average, we spend six months sitting at stoplights—and over 5 years waiting in lines. Five years of my life—waiting in lines! But they say: “Good things come to those who wait” and “Some things are worth waiting for.” I am yet to be convinced.

If good things come to those who wait, is there anything you would be willing to wait your entire life for? What about if someone offered you a million dollars if you just wait for it, your entire life? Would you be willing to wait your entire life for a million dollars? Maybe, maybe not! What good is a million dollars going to be to you if you only get it one minute before you die?

Today is the first Sunday of advent which is a time of expectant waiting and anticipation for the celebration of the Christmas and the birth of Jesus. And this morning I want us to look at Simeon who waited his entire life for something. I wonder if I was given the offer to wait my entire life for the same thing he waited for, would I do it.

Simeon is not alone in his celebration, for there was also a godly woman named Anna who steps into Simeon's blessing and has something to teach us as well. For the next few minutes, listen to the story of an old man and an old woman, who realize they stand at the hinge of history?

Luke 2:20-40

²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

²¹ Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

²² Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

The rite of purification for a mother, after the birth of a son, could only be performed after three distinct time periods, totalling 41 days:

- Seven days of ritual uncleanness
- Circumcision on the eighth day
- A further thirty-three days of ritual uncleanness

And so we see Mary going to the Temple. Assuming that Jesus was presented on the day immediately following the completion of Mary's ritual uncleanness, he was probably 42 days old when he was presented at the Temple.

²³ The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." ²⁴ So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him ²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

*²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.*

This "now" signals a dramatic change has occurred. A decisive moment has emerged that transforms everything. And he goes on to tell us why it is so important for him...

*now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.*

³⁰ I have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared for all people.

*³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!"*

Let His birth prepare you to die

Let's pause here for a bit. Simeon sings of the salvation of God, a rescue mission that is life changing. This tiny baby, just 42 days old, is God's Messiah, sent to secure salvation for the world. He is the longed-for Jewish Deliverer, who not only comes to bring glory to Israel, but then the mercy, shown to

Israel, will over-flow the banks of one people, and bring salvation to all the nations.

Isaiah 49:6: says about the messiah

*“You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me.
I will make you a light to the Gentiles,
and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”*

So the birth of Jesus marks the beginning of hope for people everywhere. But in all this amazing, unequalled work of God, don't miss the very personal point to Simeon: *I have seen your salvation, now let your servant die in peace.*

This kind of seems a bit weird – Simeon sees this baby and announces to the world that now I am ready to die. But as I thought about it maybe not so weird. I am aware of some elderly people who are not well seemingly staying alive until something significant happens, an overseas child returning home, and spouse passing away, a great grandchild being born. They were living for something and when that something happened they let go.

I wonder what would cause you to say, “and now I can die in peace?” I realise that for some of you this might seem a bit morbid. You are hoping that death is a long way off. But I also know for some of you the thought of being in a place of saying “now I can die in peace” would be just wonderful. I wonder what you might be waiting for, what you are anticipating.

For Simeon, he had been eagerly anticipating the Christ, the saviour of the world, and now he has seen baby Jesus and he was ready to die. He believed, he had the faith, without even knowing how, that it would all work out; he simply looked at a baby and saw God's solution to our separation. He trusted in what Jesus came to do, and crossed the line of readiness to meet God.

Here is a scary question. Have you crossed that line? Are you secure in your salvation, have you met God, and while you may not want to die just yet, if it happens, like Simeon, you are at peace with God?

Like Simeon, does the birth of Jesus enable you to be ready for death?

Let His life prepare you to suffer

Let's read on. In v. 33-35, Simeon has baby Jesus in his arms, has been praising God and then he stops and looks at Mary and says,

³³ Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

I am not sure this is what a new mum wants to hear. "Mary this baby is going to divide this nation. He is a sign from heaven, a warning sign, that marks the end of being relaxed about God. You are either for Him or against Him; there is no middle ground, there is no fence to sit on. To some, his coming brings heaven; to others, hell. Jesus' birth will lift up the humble and bring down the mighty. He will unite some and divide others. People will love Him and follow Him or hate Him and reject Him.

And if that isn't enough of a shock for Mary and Joseph, Simeon goes on, "And by the way Mary, a sword will pierce your own soul as well. Your son will reveal the secret thoughts and intentions of many hearts, and people don't like the truth about them to be told. And Mary, you won't like what happens to Him because of this, but it is necessary so that He may fulfil his mission, God's Mission. Basically he is saying, Mary, get ready to suffer for Christ's sake."

This passage and many others in the bible tell us that life with Jesus is not going to be easy. It is not meant to be easy; why do we expect it to be; why do we get so angry with God when there are tough times. His mission brought Him to the cross. If you follow Him, if you join his mission, it will take you there too.

Like Mary does the birth of Jesus ready you for suffering?

Let this day be the day of surrender

Let's finish the passage

³⁶ Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷ Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. ³⁸ She came

along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

When you look behind the surface story there are some fascinating contrasts here. Simeon and Anna represent opposite ends of the social spectrum. In Israel, as a priest, **Simeon** would have been the ultimate insider, part of the powerful, educated, elite. **Anna**, on the other hand, is a widow—and the fact that she lived at the temple probably indicates she was a widow with no family, no sons to take care of her. She was among the most weak and vulnerable class in Jewish society.

But there's also diversity of gender here, too: In a culture that tended to emphasize male characters and ignore female ones, not only do we have Joseph and Mary represented, but also Simeon and Anna.

The other thing to note was their age differences. I wonder if it was God's strategic plan that he surrounded the birth of Christ with diversity. Elizabeth and Zechariah, parents of John the Baptist, they were both very old, and Simeon and Anna virtually at the point of death? And then Mary and Joseph, the parents of the Messiah, so young, guestimates are that she was between 12-16. Luke doesn't necessarily focus on all the aspects of diversity, but he does seem to stress and draw attention to their ages deliberately?

There might be several answers to that, but the one that I want to emphasize is: **It is never too early or too late to be totally devoted to God**, to be fired up for Jesus, or to surrender your will to the Spirit of God, or whatever you want to call it, as He puts you in a position to be a part of His mission.

Whatever age or stage of life you might be - Let this day be the day of surrender.

As we think about Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna, two couples at either end of the age spectrum.

To the young . . .

To the teenagers and young adults here, I say this with all the conviction I can muster: **It is extremely unwise, even wrong, for you to wait until later in your life to set things right with God and give your life totally to Him.**

Suppose Mary had decided to just do the religious thing, to go through the motions of following God, to stick with the religious rules of the day, but also play with “worldliness” as well? If she had chosen that, we would know nothing of her today, but instead she responded to the angel of the Lord in Luke 1:38, *“I am the Lord’s servant, let it happen as you have said”*.

Or what if Joseph had decided as a young man in his prime to “live it up and party hard” or on hearing of Mary’s pregnancy, he decided he didn’t want to get tied down with a family, so he would ignore God for the next few years? His name would be absent from this amazing story of the birth of the saviour of the world.

I was raised in a Christian family, I have always known God, I remember thinking in my early teens that following Jesus would cramp my style, that I’ll wait until am really old (at about 40!!!) and then ask for forgiveness just before I die

Thankfully I didn’t. I made a commitment, actually a number of commitments between 16 and 18 and what an adventure I have had as a Christian. Youth leadership, camps, Beach missions, Bible college, Youth pastoring, Bangladesh, OBC, it’s been a great ride and I wouldn’t trade it for anything. It’s mainly the people.

The other day I got a facebook PM from someone I haven’t seen in years, he was a youthy in my first church 28 years ago.

Hi Brian, Hope you are well. I just wanted to let you know that you made a difference in my life. And I am grateful you did. Much thanks. God bless you, Mark

I don’t know what I did... but what a privilege, all because at age 16 I said, ok God let’s do it.

So if you class yourself as ‘young’, don’t wait around for what you think is the ‘right time’ to listen to God,

Those who think that they can put God on hold with the intention of calling on him another day, or year, think that they are the captain of their own ship. But the Bible disagrees. The Holy Spirit is like the wind. He blows where He wills,

when He wills. We neither have the power nor the inclination to come to God apart from His pursuing work.

So, to the young, don't mess around with God.

To the elderly . . .

One of the things I love about OBC is that we have a whole bunch of passionate followers of Jesus who come in a 'grey haired' edition. So to a certain degree in this point I am preaching to the converted, but I am going to say it for people who are becoming grey – people like me.

Just as it is wrong for the young to delay the decision to follow Jesus, it is deeply wrong for us, at the other end of the age spectrum, to throw in the towel early and let our heart retire from the passion for God. Just look at Simeon and Anna. Years before God made it clear to Simeon that he would live until he had seen the Messiah. We can only imagine how he might have greeted each day thereafter. "Is it today? Will I have a front row seat at the Messiah's coming? Will I be part of the revolution, part of His administration. This is so exciting!" But years and then decades flowed by, and nothing happened. Nothing changed.

There may have been a time when Anna, too, dreamed of a glorious life, Husband kids, white picket fence, but her husband died just "seven years after her marriage" (v. 36). Things had not turned out as Anna had planned. Now she is 84 and in the sunset of her life.

It would have been easy for this elderly widow and man to conclude that their best days were behind them, that the chance for any lasting influence had passed. It would have been easy to soak in the nostalgic memories of the good old days, to spend the days talking about the good old days. Instead, they persevered in their trust in God's plan and stayed faithful and responsive to the Holy Spirit. And so it was that God let them see and hear something others could only dream of.

When I was preparing this message I came across a story I liked, a true story I believe.

On November 18, 1995, the master violinist Perlman, played before an audience in New York. But within seconds of beginning, just as he finished the first stanza, a string on his violin snapped. Perlman paused

for a moment, closed his eyes, and then signalled the conductor to begin again. The orchestra recommenced, and he joined them.

He played with passion and purity, changing, retuning and recomposing the piece on the spot to make up for what was lost by the broken string. When he finished, the audience jumped to its feet. They knew the accomplishment they had just seen. Perlman responded humbly: 'You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.'

To the elderly - hang in there with God, you might need to rewrite the music on how you played it before but you can still play a great tune.