

**Notes for Family Talk for  
Sunday, 27 December 2020**

# The Perspective of Anna and Simeon

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
27 December 2020

## Intro

- Here we are just a few days after Christmas.
  - Because life goes on after big days.
- There's a lot of build up to Christmas, then there's the day itself.
  - And then there's the next day after that and the next one after that.
  - Pretty soon it will be the celebration of the new year and then the new year itself.
    - And life goes on.
  
- I found that there was some respite in the build up to Christmas.
  - It was reassuring to find that we could still decorate and do Christmassy things and feel the excitement and fun of Christmas this year.
  - But now we're beyond that and the reality of 2021 is around the corner.
    - And there are many questions.
    - Will it be better than 2020 or will it be just as volatile and unprecedented.
      - We just don't know.
  
- Now that the excitement and fun of Christmas is past, the worries about the future and the work of the new year can start returning.
  - Or maybe you're managing to shove those feelings and thoughts off for next year still.
    - If so, I apologise for bringing them to mind.
  - Or maybe you're just faced with the prospect of the monotony of another year of boredom and disconnection.
- With this in mind, I found it valuable to reflect on the story of Simeon and Anna.
- Because Simeon's story and Anna's story are both stories of people who carried on with their lives, despite hardships.
  
- Mary and Joseph (and Jesus) only meet Simeon and Anna because they're doing the things that they're supposed to.
  - They circumcised Jesus on the eighth day after his birth, according to the Jewish laws and they named Him Jesus, as the angel had told them to (Luke 2:21).
  - And then, also following the Jewish laws, after the days of Mary's purification after giving birth were completed, they took Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord and offer a sacrifice (Luke 2:22-24).
    - It's a simple idea but I think it's significant that they had this positive and strengthening experience when they were trying to do what they were supposed to do, and make the sacrifices that they were supposed to make.
  - If you're at a loss about what to do now, maybe try to think about what the Lord would want you to do and try to do that, even if it's just something very simple.

- The story talks about them meeting Simeon first but today I want to talk about Anna first.
- Here's what it says,
  - Luke 2:36-38 (NKJV)
    - <sup>36</sup> Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; <sup>37</sup> and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. <sup>38</sup> And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
  - We don't know whether Anna was 84 years old or if she had been a widow for 84 years.
    - If she had been a widow for 84 years then she was over 100 years old.
    - If she was 84 years old but had been with her husband for 7 years before he died, she probably had gotten married as a teenager and had been a widow for over 50 years.
    - Either way she was old and had been a widow for an awfully long time.
- But, despite her loss and the difficulty of being a widow in those times, Anna seemed to have a good life—a life in which she was connected with the Lord her God.
  - She was one of those people who is connected to spiritual things going on that she could be aware of the significance of Jesus having been born.
    - And so she immediately thanked God when she saw Jesus and then told other people about Him.
- She reminds me of a lovely woman who passed away a few days before Christmas this year at age 91.
  - Her name was Donnette Rose Alfelt and her husband, Lennart, passed away in 1981.
    - So, when she passed away, she'd been a widow for almost 40 years.
  - She spent decades of her life supporting widows and widowers.
    - She ran weekly support groups for decades.
    - She wrote a few books, one called *Comfort and Hope for Widows and Widowers*.
    - She was an advocate for simple yet very important truths, like the truth that people are still grieving and still need support beyond the first year after their loved one has passed.
    - Based on the teachings of the New Church, she also strongly believed that she would eventually be reunited with her dear husband and so she believed that she needed to keep on working on her marriage to him until they could be together again.
      - And so she did keep working on her marriage and supported many other widows and widowers in doing the same.
- As we think back over the hard year that 2020 was and look forward with anxiety towards 2021, I find it very useful to think about what Anna's perspective on it would be.
  - Or what Donnette's perspective would be.
  - These were both people who had experienced loss and tragedy and yet had found a way to keep living anyway, with deep gratitude to the Lord and in service to other people.
    - I saw a post from one of Donnette's children on Facebook.
      - She said that there was a strongbox from her mom that they had been told they were not supposed to open until after her death.

- Inside they found a photo of Donnette smiling with two speech bubbles taped on to it.
  - One said, “Thanks for everything!” And the other said, “I love you.”
  - It was a message to her family members but I think it also expressed Donnette’s feelings about her life and about the Lord.
    - “Thanks for everything!” “I love you.”
- The story says that when Anna saw the baby Jesus she “gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).
  - We also might be looking for redemption.
    - If you’re dealing with your personal failing or failings in your relationships, you might be looking for some kind of redemption.
    - Or you might be looking for some redeeming quality in 2020 or in the year ahead of you.
    - What might Anna the prophetess say to you?
    - What might you speak about with a person like Donnette?
- To flesh this out a bit more, now I want to talk about Simeon because we actually get to hear more conversation with Simeon.
  - Simeon is presumably also an old man.
  - It was that he was “just and devout” and was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25).
    - That’s a beautiful phrase—“the Consolation of Israel”.
      - It seems like he was someone who would have been aware of the prophecies—from Isaiah and other prophets—about the coming of the Messiah and the peace and restoration that His coming would bring.
      - So that was probably the consolation that he was waiting for.
      - And it’s clear from what he says a bit later in the story that he was not just concerned for himself; he was concerned with his whole nation, and the Gentiles, and the whole world.
        - He was longing for a time when there would be consolation for all people.
      - We can look out at the troubled world and also long for consolation and restoration.
  - The text tells us that it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that “he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26).
  - And he’s led by the Spirit into the temple at the right time for Simeon to see Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.
  - Luke 2:27-32 (NKJV)
    - <sup>27</sup> And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, <sup>28</sup> he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:
      - <sup>29</sup> “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,  
According to Your word;
      - <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen Your salvation
      - <sup>31</sup> Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
      - <sup>32</sup> A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Your people Israel.”

- And then we read about Joseph and Mary's reactions:
  - Luke 2:33-35 (NKJV)
    - <sup>33</sup> And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against <sup>35</sup> (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."
  
- There's lots that we could talk about here but what I was struck by this time was Simeon's joy and hope and trust in the face of a rather imperfect world.
  - Jesus hadn't accomplished anything yet but still Simeon knew that he could die in peace because of his certainty that the Lord was going to bring salvation to all peoples.
  - And I don't think that this was because Simeon was naive or was closing his eyes to the difficult realities of the world.
    - He said to Mary that Jesus' coming would lead to the fall and rising of many people.
      - He knew the tumult and stress that would be involved in that.
    - And he knew the pain that would be caused to good people
      - He told Mary that a sword would pierce through her own soul.
    - So Simeon knew how hard things would be for Jesus and Mary and many other people and yet still his overall response was gratitude, joy, and hope.
  
- His perspective reminds me of one of my favourite Psalms, Psalm 37, which includes these lines:
  - Psalm 37:23-25 (NKJV)
    - <sup>23</sup> The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD,  
And He delights in his way.
    - <sup>24</sup> Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;  
For the LORD upholds him with His hand.
    - <sup>25</sup> I have been young, and now am old;  
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,  
Nor his descendants begging bread.
  
- Part of what's intriguing about this Psalm is that a person who has become old would have a lot of life experience and would have seen a lot of things.
  - Which makes it all the more surprising that they say that they have never seen righteous people forsaken or the children of good people begging bread.
    - How? How could they not have seen those kinds of things?
      - They happen all the time.
  - If a young, inexperienced person were to say, "Well, nothing bad ever happens to good people," we could just chalk that up to inexperience and say, "It's just because they're young; they'll see plenty of examples in time."
  - But this Psalm is written by someone who is old and *they* are saying that they have never seen righteous people forsaken or the children of good people begging bread.
    - It must be that they have seen those things happen but, with time, they have also been able to see those hard things within the context of the Lord's constant care and Providence.
    - An old person will have seen many hard and tragic things happen, including hard and tragic things happening to good people.

- Anna had seen that; Donnette had seen that; Simeon had seen that.
- And yet they also had seen how—in the long run—the Lord was actually caring for each and every person involved throughout the whole process.
  
- As it says in the teachings of the New Church:
  - *Divine Providence* §203
    - ....the human race throughout the whole world is under the guidance of the Lord, and everyone from infancy even to the end of their life is led by Him in the most individual things.
  
  - *Secrets of Heaven* §6303
    - ....when the Lord is with any one, He leads them, and provides that all things which happen, whether sad or joyful, befalls them for good: this is the Divine providence.

## Conclusion

- I don't know about you but I can find it hard to hold on to that kind of perspective.
- That's part of the value of spending time with the story of Anna and Simeon or people like Donnette.
  - It can help you know that it is possible to see all the hard things in the world and long for things to be better and still find space for gratitude, peace and hope in spite of it all.
- If you're stuck in an anxious frame of mind about the future, I encourage you to take a more longterm view, to try to adopt the perspective of an older person of faith.
  - I think their overall message would be, "Yes, things are going to be hard—sometimes very hard but it's still worth trying to be a good loving person and do the right thing and things are also going to be ok in the long run."
  
- We'll end with a bit more of Psalm 37.
- Psalm 37:37, 39-40 (NKJV)
  - <sup>37</sup> Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright;  
For the future of that man is peace.
  - ....
  - <sup>39</sup> [T]he salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;  
He is their strength in the time of trouble.
  - <sup>40</sup> And the LORD shall help them and deliver them;  
He shall deliver them from the wicked,  
And save them,  
Because they trust in Him.
  
- *Amen.*