



Kirkcaldy and East Fife Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr Brenda Robson

Reading: Luke 2: 22 – 40 Jesus presented at the temple

Beautiful passage – faithfulness of an old man, Simeon, waiting for the Christ child, trusting in God's promises, filled with the Holy Spirit, knowing he would not die until he saw the Christ child

Anna – a prophetess, a very old woman, married for only seven years then a widow until she was 84, worshipping in the temple continuously, like Simeon waiting for the Messiah, fasting and praying and totally focused on God

Imagine how they must have felt when Joseph and Mary walked into the temple with their precious bundle. What a joy it is to hold a newborn baby – my Anna was born in April of this year, my first grandchild and it is hard to describe the emotions of holding her for the first time.

I can see Simeon taking this baby in his arms and looking into the very eyes of God, feeling the warmth of his body, perhaps unwrapping the swaddling sheets a little to get a better look, feeling the joy of the Holy Spirit within as he says-

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised. You now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel

Anna came up to them at that very moment, surely she would have reached out her arms and Simeon would have passed the child to her, her reward for years of praying and fasting and waiting. God was giving her a special glimpse of his glory

What an example of faith we have in Simeon and Anna. They were both very elderly, they represented the old traditions of the Jewish faith and yet they were a bridge to the new, to God doing a new thing. They knew that this Messiah would turn the Jewish faith upside down, would turn the world inside out, he would see right into the sinful hearts of men and women and nothing would be the same again. They could not have known the detail of Christ's life and death on earth but they did know that there would be pain – a sword will pierce your own soul too"

But they were not afraid, they did not fear this change, the new order to come – they welcomed the coming of the Messiah they had longed for.

The patience and perseverance of two elderly people

Pastor visited a run down area in London, to evening service with standing room only. All ages. Lively worship. Was it always like this? No, it used to be a small church of elderly people – told to speak to three ladies. They said that they always believed that God had a purpose for their church and they met every Tuesday night to pray for the people in the community and for revival in the church. How long did they pray for – 36 years! They were passionate about their faith and about the needs of their community.

Simeon and Anna were passionate for God, they had a heart for their people.

How does our situation compare to their situation? We are Christians, we are on the other side of the King's coming, he has come and he has gone, he has shown us his glory and shed his blood for us and risen from the dead for us, he has sent his holy spirit and he has commissioned his followers to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth – and he has promised to come again.

How much more we know of Christ than Simeon and Anna.

They did not see the blind healed and lepers clean

They did not see the prisoners set free and their chains fall off

They did not see the dead Lazarus walk from his tomb or Jairus' daughter rise from her deathbed.

They did not walk in the Garden of Gethsemane with the Lord or climb that hill at Golgotha or hear the words of mercy "Father forgive them", the words of triumph "It is finished" They did not meet him risen from the dead.

How much more we know about Jesus, how much was accomplished in a little over 30 years that God dwelt with us.

But do we have the passion of Anna? Do we long for the coming of Christ like Simeon? Because here, we are in the same position as them. They were waiting for the arrival of the Messiah because the old testament prophets had told them that God would send a saviour into the world.

We are waiting for Christ because he said that he would return.

But perhaps we are so settled and comfortable in our world that we do not think about praying and fasting for the end of history.

Do we really want Jesus to come again, to interrupt our lives and our plans?

We have already got things in our diaries for next year – maybe big events, we want them to happen, Jesus can't come yet!

We have plans for the following year, for years ahead!

We have plans! Sometimes we might say we are going to do something, God willing, but we really intend to do that thing so hopefully God is willing!

Max Lucado, in a very readable book entitled "When Christ Comes" invites us to imagine ourselves there when Christ comes. Imagine that tomorrow morning, you are sitting in a bus heading along by Peffermill towards Cameron Toll. (Lucado didn't set the scene in Peffermill but we need to set ourselves locally). Suddenly you hear a sound unlike anything you've ever heard before. It fills the air - complete surround sound. Is it a trumpet? Is it a choir? The bus driver has heard it too and he stops the bus. He gets out of the bus and you do too with all the other passengers. Cars have stopped, people are coming out of shops and houses. Children clutch onto the hands of their parents. All looking up to the sky.

And what you see and what they see has never been seen before.

The sky opens up like a curtain and brilliant light pours through onto the earth. There are no shadows, only pure light. A river of colour begins to tumble from the sky - every dazzling colour imaginable - and riding on the flow an endless host of angels. They pass through the curtain, hundreds at a time until they occupy every square inch of sky. Thousands of silvery wings rise and fall in unison and over the trumpets, the singing of Holy Holy Holy.

The final flank of angels is followed by 24 silver bearded elders and a multitude of souls who join the angels in worship.

The movement stops, the trumpets fall silent, only the chorus remains. Holy Holy Holy - with profound reverence. You feel drawn in to join with the voices and repeat the words.

Suddenly the heavens are quiet. All is quiet. The angels turn, you turn, the entire world turns - and there he is - Jesus. Through the waves of light you see the silhouetted figure of Christ the King. He is atop a great stallion and the stallion is atop a billowing cloud. He speaks and his voice surrounds you and fills you **"I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and was and who is to come, the Almighty."**

The angels bow their heads before their Lord. The elders remove their crowns before the crowning glory. And you are gazing on a figure so consuming that you know instantly, nothing else matters. Forget the shopping and the unpaid bills. Forget the housework and your aches and pains. Forget Christmas cards that you forgot to send and your car that's let you down again. All that mattered, matters no more because Christ has come!

How does that account make you feel? Joyful? Anxious? Terrified? Uncertain? A mixture of emotions?

Jesus does not want us to fear his coming. When John in Revelation fell at the feet of the Son of Man, Jesus put his right hand on John and said **"Do not**

be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever!"

Now I am aware that Christ's coming will also bring judgement and there are many in this world who should be in fear and trembling at the prospect of being judged by the God of Creation. But sometimes Christians can be so pre-occupied and fearful of the concept of judgement that they dread meeting their Saviour, they even begin to doubt whether they will be found worthy of a place in God's eternal kingdom and that is so wrong.

Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonians is positive and encouraging, it does not condemn but it gives great hope. Paul says that if your love increases and overflows for each other and everyone else and if your hearts are strong, you **will** be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when the Lord Jesus comes. Not maybe, not keep your fingers crossed and you might scrape into heaven, but rather you **will** be blameless and holy.

I am sure that Simeon and Anna were blameless and holy in the sight of God. They fixed their eyes upon God and trusted in his promises and his promises were fulfilled in their lifetime, and not only in their lifetime but in their very presence.

We need to fix our eyes upon Jesus – the words of that lovely hymn come to mind – **Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace**

Of course we need to make plans for tomorrow, for next week, for next year, to dream about the future.

We still have tasks to do – we are called to serve others, to share the gospel message, to work for Christ's kingdom

God broke into human history 2000 years ago, in an ordinary place amongst ordinary people going about their ordinary lives – because he had promised to

He will do it again – perhaps in our lifetime, perhaps not – because he has promised to – let us be prepared in case we have to say like Simeon “for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people”

Amen