

# Presentation of the Lord

02.02.2019  
By Glenn Jordan

## Introduction

In these days of great political and social upheaval it can be hard to see the enduring significance of quiet lives lived faithfully. When what is valued is boundless energy to navigate complexity, a loud voice, and the vitality to add net worth, what place do we hold for those whose borders have narrowed and whose strength is in decline? And yet in Luke's account as the two new parents rush about in frantic concern to do what the Law requires, they are impacted profoundly by these two older saints who have more time behind than ahead and few other concerns in life but to pray about the tangled and complicated world this wee one would grow up in.

---

## Text

### Luke 2:22-40

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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), 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."

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. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 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, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
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."

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. 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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

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, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 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.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

---

## Comment

As I write this piece I have just recently come from a visit to my 93 year old mother in law who still lives independently in her own home. She bid me sit down in the armchair right beside her because her hearing is not so good and I would need to shout. We caught up on the family news, she asked about my two children, her grandchildren, and we reminisced about her husband, Con, who has been gone four years now. We spoke about how good a man he was and how his influence lingers.

The days can be long for Christina and she spends a lot of time reading and praying for her family. She was never one for an active social life, she was, and is, quite shy actually, and never really ventured too far. “Con and I were just good friends,” she said, “and we were all we needed.” And so she prays for family. Awaiting her consolation and to be reunited with Con. I thought of both of them when I read this account from Luke.

I mention Con and Christina, if only to preserve the names and memories of these two older saints in the company of Simeon and Anna.

In these days of great political and social upheaval it can be hard to see the enduring significance of quiet lives lived faithfully. When what is valued is boundless energy to navigate complexity, a loud voice, and the vitality to add net worth, what place do we hold for those whose borders have narrowed and whose strength is in decline? And yet in Luke’s account as the two new parents rush about in frantic concern to do what the Law requires, they are impacted profoundly by these two older saints who have more time behind than ahead and few other concerns in life but to pray about the tangled and complicated world this wee one would grow up in.

I’m struck by Simeon’s prophetic comment to Mary, for he offers little by way of comfort or saccharine platitude. He has discerned that the coming of the Messiah is not some private, personal matter but one that concerns all the nations of the world. There’s no getting away from the political dimension of the coming of Jesus.

But it’s his word of ‘blessing’ to Mary that is so disturbing. This child will be a source of deep division, he will be someone who will be embraced or else opposed, because finally people are going to have to make choices and hearts are going to be revealed. But then to tell this young mother that her heart and soul will be pierced as well! That’s a hard message.

This old man is not exactly a great comfort. But then perhaps the accumulation of years helps with the acquisition of insight and he warns so that Mary can begin the long process of preparing her soul for a piercing. He sees with prophetic imagination that if the Messiah is going to cause the rising of some, then some will also have to fall. And that kind of revolution will not happen easily. This child is destined to be a political and social stumbling block. Jesus is the divine dividing line, the great revealer of hearts around whom there is no neutrality. That's a difficult position to occupy, and that kind of person is difficult to be around. Possibly he will even be a challenging child to raise, and Simeon doesn't hide his judgment from Joseph and Mary. This is going to be difficult.

Simeon does all of this in the knowledge that this new revelation of which he speaks, which was the fulfilment of a promise to him, is also the precursor to his own death. He won't get to see the pain the nation would have to go through as it wrestles with a difficult compromise: the glory of Israel involved a corresponding uplift for the Gentiles.

And the sorting begins immediately as Anna starts to preach. She brings news of the baby to those who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem...no-one else. Anna perceived with prophetic insight that though this baby was just a pinprick of light in the darkness of their times, still he was light, and if they remained of good heart, this light would grow. But now was the time to pick a side. This Jesus bids us make a choice. He shines a light which reveals the true motivations which had previously been kept hidden in the deeper recesses of the heart. The coming of the Messiah would test everyone, whether they had hearts large enough to embrace the newness, or whether their religious tradition and sectarianism would shrink the boundaries of what they think God could do.

In times of great political turmoil it's hard to remain above and beyond the debate and even if you don't voice an opinion people will inevitably seek to sort you and ascribe a position to you. Furthermore, there comes a time when to stand outside of a conflict is irresponsible, even cowardly. The challenge, when there can be no neutrality, is to have the wisdom to discern when and how to enter the fray. We need wisdom to know how to be there in the tumult without losing our sense of self, and courage to persist when the tide appears to be running against us. And maybe it's then that we need these older mentors who have seen this all before.

And we also need the maturity which recognises that when the promised redemption does actually come, it may not be in ways we particularly like or are comfortable with. It takes maturity to embrace the change rather than reject the very thing we have longed for for so long because it's not exactly as we thought it would be.

---

## Response

I'm struck how Luke's Gospel to this point seems well populated with older people. Elizabeth and Zechariah have been centre stage and now here Simeon and Anna. All four ultimately are noted for their insight and faithfulness, even the initially disbelieving Zechariah. Now I don't want to make an equivalence between age and insight, not all our older citizens are full of wisdom any more than all of our young people are foolish, but we must consider how the dividing force of the Jesus good news dethrones those who have laid claim to the throne, and brings in from the margins those who have been disregarded and ignored.

I'm moved to consider who in my community or in my family might be isolated because of age or infirmity, and who are deserving of my time and attention? After all, time and space needed to be made for Simeon and Anna. It's not that I'm

guaranteed prophetic insight from the person, but my choice whether or not to include those on the margins is a moment of revelation of the values that motivate me.

---

## Prayer

God of time and eternity  
Give us the patient endurance  
The faith and the wisdom  
Of Simeon and Anna  
Who waited for their moment  
And who spoke when required,  
Though it also hastened their end.

Loosen our attachments to this world  
If they should in any way  
Hinder the coming  
Of your salvation.

And when the moment arrives  
And our work and waiting is done  
Dismiss us with your blessing  
To enter the joy of our rest.

Amen