

315 Simeon and Anna

“A Happy New Year To All Our Readers!” as the saying goes. May the Lord’s blessings indeed rest upon us throughout this Anno Domini, this Year of the Lord, marking 2019 solar years since the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who was, and still is, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1.29).

As we have been hearing afresh in recent days in our various church fellowships, the Lord’s long-promised coming into this fallen world from His previous heavenly glory was virtually unknown at the time, save only to “the few” at the start – to Mary herself; to Joseph, Jesus’ adopted father; to the unimportant shepherds; and then to two other members of this select few, Simeon and Anna.

Throughout their history the children of Israel had longed for the coming of the long-promised “Anointed One”, the Messiah, and now He was here, Immanuel, God-with-us. The child Jesus was duly circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2.21 / Genesis 17.12), and then on the fortieth day since His birth, Joseph and His mother brought Jesus into the temple in Jerusalem “to present him to the Lord”, with the humblest sacrificial offering allowed, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons” (Luke 2.22 / Leviticus 12.1-8). So far there was nothing unusual going on in that scene, but all that was about to change, as we learn from the word “behold” in verse 25. The use of “behold” in the Gospels in this way always serves as a “pay-very-special-attention” message over what is coming next, and sure enough we are not disappointed, for we now meet Simeon and Anna for the first and last time in the Bible.

We read that Simeon was “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel”: and – highly unusual at that time – “the Holy Ghost was upon him”, Who had made known to old Simeon that he would not physically die until he himself had “seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2.25-26, KJV). Simeon, this God-fearing, spiritually-aware man, then “came by the Spirit into the temple” that day, and so found himself, by God’s will and guidance, in exactly the right place at exactly the right time (2.27).

The subsequent scene is familiar and precious (2.27-35): “he took him up in his arms ... he blessed God”, as Simeon realised the enormity of what was happening. He then asked that the Lord would allow him “to depart in peace” (v.29) for he had indeed now seen what had been promised to him – this little boy held in his arms being God’s “salvation ... prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (v.32). No wonder “Joseph and his mother marvelled” at what was being said (v.33). Simeon then blessed them both, and spoke those sombre, prophetic words specifically to Mary, about the divisive ministry of Jesus and “the piercing of her own soul” that lay ahead for her (vv.34-35). And then Simeon fades from the scene and we hear of him no more.

But the little holy family in the temple that day had not quite finished yet, for they now encountered Anna. We are given fascinating details about Anna (2.36-37), which at first sight might appear irrelevant, but they aren’t! A few minutes with your Concordance over the terms “Anna”, “prophetess”, “Phanuel” and “Aser / Asher” are interesting, followed by a few more minutes considering the careful mention of the figures 7 and 84. For instance, we know that often in Scripture 7 denotes spiritual perfection; and $84 = 7 \times 12$, with 12 denoting governmental perfection. So we can

see Anna the prophetess as being a prophetic “type” of the full, final, total blessings intended for believing Israel by this advent of Jesus their Messiah - (blessings refused at Jesus’ first advent, so they are yet to be outpoured, and received, at His second advent (egs., Matthew 24.29-31 and parallels / Romans 11, especially vv 22-36)).

Anna “departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” – what an example! (2.37). As with Simeon, the true identity of the Child before her eyes was revealed to her: she gave thanks to the Lord, and “spoke of him” – not to everyone, but – “to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (2.28).

The rest, as they say, is history, or rather - His Story, in which, by God’s bountiful grace and Jesus’ immense self-sacrifice, we can all be involved by simple faith and daily discipleship. As 2019 starts, with photos of a distant object in space, a landing on the far side of the Moon and - oh dear - the impending revival of the Brexit shouting-match, may we still be the Simeons and Annas of today, with “the Holy Ghost upon us”, praising God the Father for the gift of His Son, and making Jesus known in life, word and deed.

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