

Simeon's Song

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Eden and Beth. Good afternoon, everyone. My name's Ian. I'm on the staff team in the church here. Delighted to join you, join with Graham, and welcome you this morning. I want to introduce you in a second to the oldest member of our church here, whose name is Jenny Oliver.

I think we have a picture of her. There she is. Jenny is 95 years old. She's not been very well at all recently, and she's just looking forward to going to be with Jesus.

But a few years ago, when Jenny was able to come to the church services, our family knew her as the cookie lady. And the reason for that was every Sunday, when Jenny came to church, she brought along a bag of chocolate biscuits.

Might be Kit Kats and blue ribbons and things like that. And she went around the church, and she gave them to all the children who were out at church on Sunday. Because Jenny really loved children, and she wanted them to feel welcome and wanted a church and to look forward to coming here.

And I think in our church, we've got a lot of older people who are like Jenny. They maybe don't bring chocolate biscuits along with them every week, but they love seeing all the young people in the church. The young people in the front row, you will know the older people who speak to you or say hello, and many others perhaps talk to your mum and dad about you and pray for you.

[1 : 2 1] A lot of older people who love younger people. Eddie Mitchell, who passed away this week, as we heard earlier, he worked as a lollipop man down at South Morningside School. Someone else who really loved young people there and in the church.

And this morning, this afternoon, we're thinking about two old people who took great joy in young people. Now, the old people were called Simeon and Anna.

We don't know exactly how old Simeon was, but I think we can assume he was an old man. He was ready to go and to be with God, to leave this world, and he was just waiting until he saw the Messiah God had promised, and then he knew he would die.

I would think he was quite an old man. We know a little bit more about Anna. I said in our reading, Anna was 84 years old. Actually, a lot of people think Anna was quite a bit older than that, because it may be that the correct way to translate what the original language said was that Anna had been a widow for 84 years.

It's 84 years since her husband had died. And if she was like that, that would make her well over 100 years old. She was a very old woman.

[2 : 3 4] But as Jesus came with his mother and with Joseph to the temple, and Simeon and Anna saw them, they were really happy to see them.

And there were two young people involved. It wasn't just Jesus. Of course, they were happy to see the baby Jesus. Everyone loves a baby, and they knew this was a special baby. But they were also really happy to see Jesus' mother, Mary.

Mary was probably just a young teenager. She was a very young person. And Simeon and Anna, as they saw her, they rejoiced with her in the joy that she had in having her baby Jesus.

And they wanted to help her, and Simeon in particular, to tell her a little bit more about what God wanted her to know. Older people who loved younger people.

And I want just for a few minutes, it's not really in Simeon's song, though we'll refer to bits of it. I just want for a few minutes to talk about older people and some of the things those of us who are younger can learn from.

[3 : 35] When I say younger, I do mean children of school, but it might be people in their teens, 20s, 30s. And if you're older than that, you can decide whether you're young or old. But I want to talk about some of the things that younger people can learn from older people that we see in the passage we read this morning.

And the first thing is we can learn a lot about prayer from people who are older. When we're older, often we're not able to do as much as we could when we were young in working and in serving in the church.

But everyone can pray. And a lot of the older people in this church, I know, spend a lot of time praying for the church in general, but particularly for the younger people in the church.

People who just want younger people to know and to love Jesus and to want the church to grow and to be really blessed by him.

In this passage, we have two older people who really knew how to pray. When we look at Simeon's song, we can see he had a really close relationship with God.

[4 : 43] The passage that Beth read from Isaiah 42, he quotes from in his prayer. And you can see this isn't the first time. This isn't something unusual he does. He comes to God in prayer.

He is really someone who knows God, who loves him, and who spends a lot of time praying. Even more remarkable is Anna, because it tells us that Anna spent all her time in the temple praying and fasting.

She came to church every day and she stayed there. And what she wanted to do was to pray and to bring her requests and her thanksgivings to God.

So much so that she gave that priority over eating. She was quite happy not to eat so that she could concentrate on praying to God. So one of the lessons I think we all need to learn this morning is how important it is that we have that kind of relationship with God, that we come to him and we pray and we speak to him very regularly.

That's something I think older people can teach younger people. Same thing I was thinking about was patience. When we're young, we want everything immediately.

[5 : 58] When my grandson Archie comes to our house, he immediately wants to play. He says, now, Grandad, now, Grandad, I want to play now. And he's very impatient. It's not unusual that all young people are to some extent impatient.

Even as we get a little bit older, we want things to happen quickly. Older people have more time and life goes at a slower pace and they've learned the value of being patient.

Simeon and Anna were older people who had learned how to be patient. They were both looking forward to God coming and to moving in his people Israel.

Simeon, it says, was waiting for the consolation of Israel, waiting for the one who would be the saviour of Israel. And Anna was someone who's looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

And they'd been waiting a very long time. The Old Testament, the last bit of the Old Testament was written about 400 years before Jesus was born. A lot of the prophecies, Isaiah, for instance, where there's a lot of talk about the Messiah and the one who was coming.

[7 : 06] It was written about 700 years before Jesus was born. King David, who is very much seen as the forerunner of Jesus, was about 1,000 years before Jesus was born. There had been a long, long wait.

And Simeon and Anna were waiting patiently and looking forward to God coming and to working among his people. They were patient. And we all of us need to learn to be patient, to remember that God's time and the way God works isn't necessarily the same as our time.

We like things to happen quickly. God sometimes says, no, and you need to wait. And my best thing for you is that you wait and you get my real blessing after a period.

We've been waiting 2,000 years for Jesus to come back again. He's promised he'll come back. It hasn't happened yet. We need to be patient. We know it will happen one day and we need to be ready for it.

Many people here have been praying for their families or for friends for many years and they haven't yet become Christians. And God just says, be patient. Keep going. My way is best.

[8 : 15] My timing is best. We need to be patient. Older people are very often patient. patient. The last thing, and the one I'm going to spend longest on, is old people have a sense of perspective.

Now, perspective is being able to see a picture kind of the way it should be. So this picture up on the screen now, it looks like a huge dinosaur with lots of little people in the background. In fact, if you look closely, it's a little plastic dinosaur, the kind many children might get this Christmas, and the people are just a long way away.

You need a sense of perspective to be able to see the right picture. And older people very often have a good sense of perspective. They've been around for a long time.

Lots of things have happened to them. And they don't get too excited about things that are maybe not that important because they can see the bigger picture. Again, when we're young, we tend to focus on ourselves and the things that are immediately in front of us and important to us.

And perhaps we don't always see the big picture. I'm very struck by a number, a lot of older people in this church who rejoice in what God is doing among us in the church here.

[9 : 26] And I know that for them, it is not the way that they would choose to worship or to do things, not the way they've been used to. But they can see that the bigger picture is that God is with us, that there are lots of young people coming to the church and growing up to love Jesus.

And they rejoice because they've got that perspective that says, God is at work. And what immediately might be important to me isn't really important in the grand scheme of things.

And we need to learn a perspective to see the big picture, see what really matters, and not just necessarily what's right in front of us. And so as we come now eventually to look at Simeon's song, I want to talk about Simeon's perspective.

What was it that Simeon saw as Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus came to the temple? Well, there were some things that were fairly obvious.

He saw a young mother and her child. And I'm sure he saw the delight that Mary was taking in the baby Jesus. He also saw a couple who were really devoted to God.

[10 : 34] That was at the start of the reading from Luke. Why did Mary and Joseph go to the temple with Jesus? They went so that they could do what the law from the Old Testament said they had to do.

Mary had to be purified because she had just had a baby. They wanted to dedicate their son to God, to say this is our first son and we really want him to be devoted to God.

And of course they knew from what had been said by the angels that he would be. I suspect they also saw a couple, a family who lived in some poverty, who didn't have very much money.

And that is evidenced by the fact that they brought two turtle duff. They brought a sacrifice that was designed for people who were relatively poor. More well-off people would have brought a lamb or something as a sacrifice.

So they saw a relatively poor family. But of course Simeon saw much, much more than that. He saw the fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah. And he saw two things that this new baby would bring to the world.

[11 : 43] He saw God's salvation. Verse 30 in the passage, My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations.

Salvation is the great theme that runs through the Christmas story. Jesus was given his name, Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins.

It means God saves. The angels, when they came and they spoke to the shepherds, they talked about one who was born, who is a saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

And Simeon picks that up and he says, What I see in front of me in this little child, in this little baby, I see salvation. I see God coming into the world through his son to be the saviour of the world.

And as I see it, I recognise that it's not just for me. It's not just for the people in Jerusalem or in Israel. God's son has come into the world to be the saviour of the world.

[12 : 50] He says, you've prepared it in the sight of all nations. And above all else at Christmas, we should think about the fact that Jesus came into the world to be the saviour of the world.

And Jesus came into the world so that each of us who trusts in him can be saved from the sin that we have by the punishment that he took through his death on the cross.

Simeon saw salvation in the baby in front of him. He also saw revelation. That's in verse 32. He talks about light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

How do we know what God is like? Well, we know what God is like to some extent by looking around us at creation and seeing the greatness and the wonder of creation. But we know particularly what God is like by looking at this baby who grew up to be a man and who lived as God with us.

God has revealed himself to us through Jesus. And again, it's not just to the Jews. It's not just to God's historic people that he's revealed.

[14 : 03] He has revealed himself to us, to the Gentiles, to everyone in the world who is willing to look and to consider this baby, this man who came among us.

It's a glory for Israel because it was a nation of Israel that the Lord Jesus first came. But he came to be a light so that all of us could see and to reveal God to each of us.

Simeon saw salvation and he saw revelation. But then Simeon moves on from what I suppose we think of as a song. And he has one more thing to say.

And he has that to say to Mary. Now, the Christmas story in Luke is very much Mary's story. Jesus' story, of course, but very much Mary's story seen through Mary's eyes.

And the gradual way in which God reveals himself and what this new baby really means to Mary. And so here we have it through Simeon.

[15 : 00] And Simeon foresaw two things. He saw and he foresaw. He foresaw that this child who came, such a source of joy and of happiness for Mary and for those who are willing to listen.

He would be someone who would experience great sadness and who would bring division in the land. So Simeon says, 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 the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

Yes, the Christmas story is a really happy one. There's real joy as we go through in Luke's Gospel and elsewhere as we see all that God does for us through the Lord Jesus.

But we mustn't forget that Jesus came as someone who was here to divide people between one another. He came with the offer of salvation and revealed God to us, but he also presents us with a choice.

And Simeon says the choice that will be made by many people in Israel will be to reject Jesus. And ultimately it would be his own people, the Jews, who would lead to him being crucified on the cross.

[16 : 23] He divided the people. And Jesus still divides people today. We may look around and think, yes, great, everyone here loves Jesus and wants to know him.

And yet he does divide us, and perhaps there are those here today who don't yet know Jesus and who don't understand all that he has done for us.

And I would urge you, if you're in that group, to recognise that people are divided into those who know Jesus and who have eternal life and those who don't know and trust Jesus and will face the consequences for their sins.

Jesus is someone who brings division because we have to decide whether we're going to accept or to reject him. And then finally, Simeon foresaw for Mary desolation.

He says, a sword will pierce your own soul. Mary, who was so happy at the birth of Jesus, and as she came to the temple, was able to show him off and to present him to everyone there.

[17 : 28] Thirty-odd years later, she would be sitting under his cross and would be in desolation, would be in real anguish as she saw her son being crucified by the Romans.

For her, there was happiness, but there was also to be sadness, and Simeon was preparing her for that. And as we look at the birth of Jesus, we must also look forward to his death.

The two go together. He was born so that he could live a perfect life and so that he could die for us on the cross at Calvary. And we need to remember the sadness that that brought to Mary.

And the sadness it should bring us because we know that it was our sins that he was there to die for. By great joy that he is alive today and that the one who came many years ago is coming back again to take those who love him to be with him.

So Simeon saw, he saw salvation and revelation, and he foresaw division and desolation. And so we go towards Christmas in the next couple of days, and Christmas for all of us, whether we're young or we're old, I hope will be a time of real joy.

[18 : 46] But let's make sure particularly it's a time of joy because our trust is in Jesus and we know his salvation and we know that we have through him eternal life.

That that babe born in Bethlehem, presented here in the temple, is the one who is alive today and can be our saviour and our Lord.

I want to end with the words of another old man. Timothy Dudley Smith will be 92 this week. And Timothy Dudley Smith, I particularly associate with Christmas because every year when he sent his Christmas card, he wrote a little poem to go in it and many of his poems have become Christmas carols.

We sang one of them earlier on. Timothy Dudley Smith wrote a poem that was a meditation on these verses on the Song of Simeon. So it's quite short.

I'm going to read the whole poem and then the last verse we'll use as our closing prayer. I'll highlight when we come to that. Here's what the words say. Just a reminder of what Simeon said. Now here's our prayer.

[20 : 14] Christ, your people's glory, watching, doubting cease, grant to us, your servants, our discharge in peace.

Amen. May God bless his word.