

Adventuring

4 Advent Reflections for groups or individuals in the second half of life

Week Four: Simeon and Anna

Simeon and Anna had learnt how to wait: how to work with, rather than against, the seasons. The hope planted in them was real. The day was coming. Their waiting was not the impatient, grumbling, restlessness of the one who waits for the delayed train, or the one who frets whilst waiting to finally get through to the right person on an automated phone line. Their waiting was attentive, and hope-filled. The day would not be hurried, but the day would come. Simeon waited on the Spirit, until the morning he was led to the Temple. Anna continued to praise God, grounding herself in the remembrance of God's goodness and faithfulness. They are open-hearted people, ready to receive the new whilst awake to what is gift in the present. With those open and hospitable hearts they welcome a young family and a small child.



Older age as a time for waiting in hope and expectation

Prayer is an active waiting on God.

Our attentiveness, our 'gazing', is turned towards the Lord who has come, who is now present with us and who will come again in glory. Every moment is rich with encounter.

As we look back on our lives we trace the path of his working.

And now we look forward with hope and expectation.

Nicodemus wondered how a grown person could be born again.

Simeon and Anna lead us in being open to being born anew in the birth of the Saviour

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem

[Luke 2: 22-38]

Some questions for reflection and sharing:

1. Simeon and Anna appear for a brief moment in Luke's Gospel. Why do you think Luke draws them to our notice? What part do they play in the story of our salvation?
2. Share an experience of waiting that felt difficult? Why was this so? Now share an experience of waiting that felt energising? What made the difference?
3. There is a contrast between all the movement and bustle of life on the streets of Jerusalem, the noise and activity of the Temple and the still quality of Simeon and Anna's waiting. Where does the balance in your own life fall between busyness and stillness?

What is it time for you to do?

Advent is a time of waiting with joyful hope. On the bare branches of trees buds have formed. The days are at their shortest, but soon they will begin their lengthening

- As you prepare for Christmas consider whether there is one person in particular you want to open a space for in your heart. How will you do this?
- Consider what it is you are waiting and longing for from the Lord this Christmas. Each day this week bring this desire to God in prayer.

Some Advent Challenges:

1. Create a prayer space in your home. It might be a corner of a room that becomes a set aside place of prayer. You might leave a candle there, ready to be lit, or have words from the bible that are special to you, or pictures that speak to you of God. Make the space feel homely and inviting so that when you visit it you know you have come here to be attentive to the Lord.
2. Look through a hymn book and choose an Advent or Christmas Carol that expresses what you seek or feel this season. Reflect on the words and their significance for you – and sing it too!

For Reflection:

What is stirring, waking,
not of our making,
but simple giving,
shaped for our longing?

The Virgin, weighed
with the Word of God,
comes down the road:
if only you'll shelter her.
[John of the Cross]

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.
[Luke 1]

A prayer for the last days of Advent

Lord, I offer my day to you
It is your gift to me.
Draw me to yourself.
Help me to be awake to your presence
And let your Spirit grow in me.
For this is my desire.

A prayer for the Christmas season

Jesus, I am in wonder
that you choose me.
You make your home in me.
You are my peace,
You are my home.
In you I have life.
Through you I will grow