

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

1st Sunday after Christmas

27th December, 2020

The Triune God meets with us

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. (Luke 2:34,35 NIV)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

We sing the song 'Lift this child to the sun (Anna's Song)'

1. **Lift this child to the sun,
raise this child to the sky;
God has come from above,
come to earth from on high.
Lift this child, lift this child to the sun.**
2. **Lay this child on the ground,
one with us, one with earth;
let God know in his Son
human clay, human birth.
Lay this child, lay this child on the ground.**
3. **Place this child in the shade,
hang this child 'neath a tree;
with his hand on the wood
may this child set us free.
Place this child, place this child in the shade.**
4. **Give this child to the world,
let him be common folk;
God has come to be born
as an ordin'ry bloke.
Give this child, give this child to the world.**

5. **Send this child down the road,
let him ride hard the track;
to be king of the bush
and the harsh world outback.
Send this child, sent this child down the road.**
6. **Lift this child to the night,
to the silence of God;
let this child cry for us,
and the silence be heard.
Lift this child, lift this child to the night.**

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Music © Robin Mann, 1949 – (1981)
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We confess our sins to God the Father...

We lay down our sins and burdens before God

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of each other.

**We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven,
and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by our
own fault. Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and
bring us to eternal life. Amen.**

...and God forgives us

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our
sins.

Amen.

Restore us again, O God our Saviour.

Do not be angry with us any longer.

Jesus leads us as we pray

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Let us pray that through Jesus we share in God's nature. *[silence]*

Almighty and merciful God, we thank you for sending your Son to become
human like us, so that we might become your children.

Make us who trust in Jesus to be more and more like him. For he lives and

**reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.**

1st Reading – God speaks through his prophets

Isaiah 61:10- 62:3 *The Lord will save his people*

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

¹ For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

² The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

We respond with Psalm 148

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

Praise the Lord!

All his angels; all his host!

Praise the Lord!

Sun and moon; and all you shining stars!

Praise the Lord!

You highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Praise the Lord!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.
He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord!

You sea monsters and all deeps!

Praise the Lord!

Fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Praise the Lord!

Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

Praise the Lord!

Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

Praise the Lord!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

Praise the Lord!

Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Praise the Lord!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!

2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

Galatians 4:4-7 *God sent his Son to free us*

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption

to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel Reading – God speaks through Jesus

Luke 2:22-40 *Simeon and Anna see Jesus*

²² 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 ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ 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."

²⁵ 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. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ 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, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ 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, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ 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, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ 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.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ, Light of the world.

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming as the Messiah that God had promised.

Help us to acknowledge you as our Saviour.

Amen

We sing the song 'Loving Spirit'

1. **Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.**

2. **Like a mother you enfold me,
hold my life within your own,
feed me with your very body,
form me of your flesh and bone.**

3. **Like a father you protect me
teach me the discerning eye,
hoist me up upon your shoulder,
let me see the world from high.**

4. **Friend and lover, in your closeness
I am known and held and blessed:
in your promise is my comfort,
in your presence I may rest.**

1. **Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.**

Words: Shirley Erena Murray (1990) © Hope Publishing Co.

God speaks to us

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas, Year B

Text: Luke 2:36-38

There are so many interesting people and groups of people in the Christmas story.

Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, The shepherds and the angels, Herod and the wise men.

Considering each of these, and their role in the account of Jesus' birth, is a rich source of meditation over the Christmas season...to think about what we can learn from each of them and why they are there, how we can be encouraged in faith as we see who they are, what they do, and most importantly what God does for them and through them.

In our text today, we meet two more fascinating figures, Simeon and Anna. I'd like to spend today focusing our attention especially on Anna, often known as Anna the prophetess. Anna's role in the drama is really only a little cameo - only three verses in which she appears. But there's some significant things in this little cameo, it's worth paying attention to.

With Anna today let's consider who she is, what she does, and why it matters.

So, who is Anna?

First, a prophet, or a prophetess. As you probably know all the major prophets of the Old Testament were men, but there are also women such as Anna who are given the title of prophetess. In the Scriptures men and women always serve alongside each other in complementary ways.

Now what this actually means for Anna to be a prophetess is unclear. Was it that she was married to a prophet before he died? Or is this a general reference to her life of devotion at the Temple? Was it a special gift of foreknowledge in some sense?

It's hard to say.

Actually it could be that the focus of her being a prophet is this scene in our text,

where she 'speaks about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem', speaking about Jesus the redeemer who has just been born.

Next we read she is a daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. What's interesting here is that the tribe of Asher was one of the 10 northern tribes who were carried off by the Assyrians never to be seen again. They're sometimes known as the lost tribes.

Yet here we are hundreds and hundreds of years after that, and we meet a faithful woman from the tribe of Asher. So it seems even in those tribes who were more or less destroyed there was a remnant preserved by God. There must have been migration of some sort too, so that Anna from the tribe of Asher finds herself in the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus.

Then the last bit of biographical information we learn about Anna is that she 'lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of 84'.

So what's emphasised here is that she had some tragedy early in her life, her husband dying when she was only a young woman, so that she was a widow, a single person, and that she was elderly.

Let's think about how these details of who Anna is can encourage us.

We live in a time when there really is an obsession with youth. People want to look younger, act younger, feel younger, and consequently then this often means the elderly are neglected and looked down on.

But the Scriptures present a very different picture for us, not least in the person of Anna.

The elderly are important to God. God continues to bless and work through older people.

The book of Proverbs says,

'Listen to your father who gave you life,
And do not despise your mother who is old'.

Job says,

'Wisdom is with the aged,
And understanding in length of days'.

But it's not only that younger people are to honour older people. This text also

encourages older people as they see how God continues to bless them and be at work through them.

Then there's also the reality that Anna is a widow, she is single.

This is worth considering as well. The single life can have its challenges too can't it?

Some of you know that Christmas can be a difficult time as a single person for various reasons.

And in the life of the church too being single is not always easy.

In the Christian church we rightly want to honour family life and children as gifts and blessings from God, but sometimes that can happen to such an extent that single people struggle to find their place. But again in the Scriptures the single life is held up to us as an important and dignified calling.

Jesus was single.

The Apostle Paul was single.

And while holding up marriage as one of the foundational institutions of God's creation, the New Testament can also speak of singleness as a gift from God. So it's worth pausing to consider Anna the faithful elderly widow, and especially how her example can encourage those whose vocations in life overlap with hers.

So that's who Anna is. Next let's look at what she does.

The text says,

'She never left the Temple,

But worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day'.

I can't help but think of verses from the Psalms when I read about Anna, where the psalmists speak to God about 'loving to be in your house', 'longing for the courts of the Lord',

And especially Psalm 92 where it says this:

'The righteous flourish like the palm tree...

They are planted in the house of the Lord...

They still bear fruit in old age...' Psalm 92:12-14

Here's Anna, planted in the house of the Lord for all those years, now bearing fruit in old age. So how does the planted tree gain its nourishment to bear fruit?

Well ironically it's by foregoing nourishment in a physical sense.

She worshipped with fasting and prayer.

And these are all supposed to go together—she worshipped, she served, she devoted herself to God at the temple, and she did this through and by fasting and prayer. In the Bible fasting and prayer often go together almost as one activity. Anna is held up to us as an example of extraordinary devotion to God.

What Anna does is worth us paying attention to as well, because the world around us will give us no encouragement in these things. Many people would say that spending all your time at the temple fasting and praying is a waste of time. Why didn't she get out into the real world and do something useful with her time?

But it seems we have here a God-given corrective to that sort of worldly thinking. Anna spent all her time at the temple fasting and praying, and this is held up to us as a good thing.

Now that's not to say everyone is called to this. Presumably Anna either never had children or they had grown up by now, because it would not be a godly thing to spend all her time at the Temple fasting and praying if it meant she neglected her family at home.

But particularly in her situation this was a wonderful way to dedicate her life. And it's worth noting here that prayer and service to God is a theme that comes up several times in connection with the single life in the Bible. So Jesus speaks of the single life. 'Eunuchs' is the term he uses, who live this life 'for the sake of the kingdom'.

And the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians speaks in this way:

'The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband.'

Now remember Jesus and Paul both teach marriage as a good gift from God, but they can also speak of special blessings and gifts associated with the single life, particularly being for greater devotion and service of God.

So first we looked at Who Anna was, then at what she did. Finally let's ask the question why it matters.

So there's Anna, worshipping God day and night with fasting and prayer. We're not told exactly what she was praying for. But the next verse gives us a fairly strong indication, 'At that moment Anna came...' Which is the moment when Simeon was blessing Mary and Joseph having seen Jesus with his own eyes, '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'.

Redemption.

That's what Anna had been praying for.

Just like Simeon she was waiting for the consolation of Israel, waiting and praying for God's chosen Messiah to come to save his people. Ultimately it's Jesus and what God has done for us in him that is the reason all this matters. Yes Anna is an example of devotion to God and prayer and fasting, and yes Anna can bring particular encouragement to the elderly to and those who are called to live a single life, but that's not what's most important.

What most important is that in Jesus this little baby brought to the Temple by his parents Mary and Joseph, God has come to Anna, God has come to Simeon, God has come to you bringing his salvation.

Anna spoke to those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Redemption, that's what this child brings. In this holiday time many of us tend to watch more movies than normal don't we? And in movies one of the common plot lines is to have a character in need of redemption. A character whose life hasn't turned out right, a character who has gone off the rails, a character who is trapped in some sort of dark place in life and the unfolding of the movie is about that character finding some sort of redemption.

Well the Christian drama is one where we are all that character in need of redemption, and Jesus Christ is one who brings it. As Simeon had just prayed before the events of our text, in Jesus Simeon rejoiced that he was seeing the Lord's salvation, that Jesus would be a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to his people Israel.

Can you just imagine this moment for Simeon and Anna? Simeon who had that special revelation that he wouldn't die before he saw the Messiah. And Anna who was continually in the temple praying day and night for the Messiah, praying for the redemption he would bring for who knows how long, perhaps for decades and decades and decades...

And then there is this moment when they see the child Jesus and they know, God is faithful....

God has come to his people...

Redemption is here.

Dear friends, God is faithful. He has not left you in the slavery of your sin in need of redemption but he has sent the Messiah for you. But as Simeon's mysterious blessing reminds us, the redemption comes through a sign that is opposed, the redemption for Mary his mother is first experienced as a piercing sword.

In other words, the cross casts its shadow over Jesus' life all the way back to his infancy.

Here Mary and Joseph finish everything required by the law up to this point, but finally the requirements of the law will mean that Jesus sacrifices his perfect life for us, as the once for all sacrifice for our sins, all to redeem us.

It can't be summed up any better than St Paul did in our second reading today:

'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.'

So who was Anna?

An elderly widow who was a prophetess, pointing us to the importance of people like these in our congregation today. Let us honour our older generations.

What did she do?

She fasted and prayed at the temple night and day, held up to us as an extraordinary example of devotion to God, particularly for those who live a single life.

Why does all this matter?

Because it all leads us to Jesus, the one who brings us redemption. Amen.

We confess our faith in the Triune God

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,
from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

** 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'*

We sing the song 'Now, Lord, you let your servant go'

- 1. Now, Lord, you let your servant go
In peace, according to your word;
For I have seen your saving love,
Which you have shown to all of us.**
- 2. For your salvation now is seen
By all the nations of the earth:
A light to show your way to all,
For glory to your chosen race.**
- 3. All praise to God the Father now,
All praise to Jesus Christ the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit praise,
Both now and evermore. Amen.**

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We give of ourselves

Thank you, Lord, for sending your Son Jesus Christ to save us and to set us free

from sin and the condemnation of the law.

Lead us to live as people who are truly free to serve you. May your Spirit live in our hearts and guide us to do your will.

Amen.

We pray for others

In the birth of our Saviour, we have seen the salvation that God has prepared in the presence of all peoples. Let us pray to God our Father for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father: we give you thanks for the leaders of your church throughout the world and for the leaders of the Lutheran Church of Australia, especially our Bishop (insert name) and District Bishop (insert name). Help them to boldly lead the church in caring for the vulnerable among us- the sick, the poor, the unborn, the orphaned and the elderly.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We uplift to you in prayer our pastors, teachers, and church workers. Bless their work and encourage their hearts when they feel disappointed or that their efforts are having no effect. Help all your people to shine the light of Christmas into the lives of others so that more people may come to know your love and salvation.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Bless our elected leaders and all in authority. May their decisions and actions always be working for peace and justice. Protect all who serve in our armed forces, particularly those who are far away from home at this time, and all whose work is dangerous or difficult.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Bless our families. Help us to learn to pray together and grow in faith. We pray that you would comfort those who are hurting because of family problems and bring peace where there is conflict. Be with those who are experiencing difficulties in their marriages: help to open the channels of communication and forgiveness. Protect the lives of children not yet born and grant that parents will cherish the life entrusted to their care.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are sick, hospitalized, or suffering, especially (insert names). May they trust in you as their helper, the upholder of their lives, and their

healer. We pray for the elderly, that you will sustain them in faith and let their example encourage the whole church.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Protect all who travel, so that they may arrive safely at their destinations. In the midst of our Christmas celebrations help us remember those whose holiday joy has become sorrow for any reason.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Lord, you remember your promises, and you give your life and salvation to those who wait for you. Hear our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

We pray the prayer of Jesus

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.** *Matt 6:9-13*

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.

Amen.

The Triune God sends us out with blessing

Christ the Son of God give you joy and peace by his presence with you;

And the Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favour and give us peace.

Amen.

We sing the song 'The potter's hand'

**Beautiful Lord, wonderful saviour
I know for sure, all of my days**

**are held in Your hands
Crafted into Your perfect plan**

**You gently call me, into Your presence
Guiding me by, Your Holy Spirit
Teach me dear Lord
To live all of my life through Your eyes**

**I'm captured by, Your Holy calling
Set me apart
I know You're drawing me to Yourself
Lead me Lord I pray**

**Take me, Mold me
Use me, Fill me
I give my life to the Potter's hands
Hold me, Guide me
Lead me, Walk beside me
I give my life to the Potter's hand**

**You gently call me, into Your presence
Guiding me by, Your Holy Spirit
Teach me dear Lord
To live all of my life through Your eyes**

**I'm captured by, Your Holy calling
Set me apart
I know You're drawing me to Yourself
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**Take me, Mold me
Use me, Fill me
I give my life to the Potter's hands
Hold me, Guide me
Lead me, Walk beside me
I give my life to the Potter's hand**

*Songwriters: Darlene Joyce Zschech
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Announcements