

PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

Hebrews 2:14-18 Luke 2:22-40

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton
at Tomorata and Hakaru, Sunday 31 January 2016

[MW16-03]

Those of you who have children

- do you remember registering the birth of your first child?
a legal formality that recognises your baby is part of a whole wider world
- in a sense this is what is going on in today's gospel reading
Mary and Joseph, an ordinary couple
come to the Temple to do what is required for their baby

An ordinary event for this baby who is indeed ordinary

- in that he is just like any baby who's birth we might register
who begins life just like you and I began our lives
- and at the same time this baby is also extraordinary
because he is the Son of God
- reminding us again of the amazingness of this ordinary event
because this is how God has chosen to come into our world
and share our life

Our first reading from Hebrews puts it like this:

*For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham.
Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect (2:16-17a)*

It is just as if we are Jesus' sisters and brothers

- he became like us in every respect
starting out as a baby with all the ordinary and usual and expected things

Which is all well and good, but consider this:

- Christmas and highlighting the baby in the manger is behind us
over a month ago
which in this fast-paced modern world means it is all but forgotten
as if it never happened
- so just what is God up to???

For a few hundred years the people of Israel had been remembering

- the words of the prophets about a "promised Messiah"
and waiting for his arrival
- then God spoke to Mary through the angel Gabriel
then another period of waiting – only nine months this time
and then, after all that time, the promised one arrived ... as a baby!
- and just what was a baby going to do???
what can a baby do ... more waiting until he grows up I guess!

Looking at things this way it sure seems God is in no hurry to act

- what patience God has!
yet to my eyes, and maybe yours too, it sure seems a strange way
to begin to build a new kingdom

Now the birth of Jesus, the promised one, the Messiah
- was supposed to be, and indeed is, a turning point
but think about this:
who knows about it? Who knows about it!?!

The only people who know so far are a group of probably illiterate shepherds
- and a young couple from a back country village
we could perhaps also add some foreign scholars from afar
- so, who the heck knows about the arrival of God's promised Messiah
in this baby Jesus?
- the whole thing seems in danger of collapsing before it's even begun!
talk about us having faith
what about the faith of God embarking on such an unusual venture ...

Reminds me of a story I came across:

A group of angels had heard about God's plan for coming to earth and meet to discuss it with him. The angels say: Let's get this right. You're going to earth as a baby, born into the care of a peasant couple. You will live in a small town in a dusty, insignificant country ... and this will change the world? Yes, answers God. The angels ask, but isn't it dangerous? You might be killed. Or worse, you might be totally ignored and overlooked ... you sure you haven't got another plan? There must be a better way! No. That's the plan, answers God. The angels walk away shaking their heads.

And well they might!

Today in our gospel reading, to those who know and believe in the birth of the Saviour
- are added two more people
but even this doesn't seem all that hopeful:
Simeon is an old man, and the widow Anna is even older!
- both of them will probably die soon
in fact Simeon seems to be positively looking forward to it

Just to set the scene, have any of you been to the Cathedral in Auckland?
- or indeed any cathedral?
there are always things going on, people coming and going during the week
- the Jerusalem Temple was just like that, only even busier
and among all the comings and goings and people and hustle and bustle
Simeon and Anna notice one particular couple and their baby
- Anna and Simeon picked out this ordinary couple, Mary and Joseph
doing the ordinary thing
for their ordinary, and at the same time extraordinary baby, Jesus

God had promised Simeon that he would not die
- until he had seen, with his own eyes, the Messiah
Luke tells us that Simeon not only saw but held the Messiah
the baby Jesus, which stirs him to break into song:
giving thanks that God has kept his promise
- and now, now, he may die in peace

The promise of a human being is all too often broken or forgotten

- today we rejoice with Simeon because God keeps his promises in Genesis 28:15 the Lord God says to Jacob:
I am with you and will protect you everywhere you go and will bring you back to this land.
I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you

Simeon sings because now he knows that salvation has come

- for all the peoples of the world
too often our vision becomes narrow and restricted
so that we serve and share the Good News only with people who look, think or live as we do
- barriers of race, creed, class, social status
are all crossed and broken down in the Good News of which Simeon sings
- the birth of the Saviour means salvation has come for all people even for us

Simeon is active in witness by song

- a song we are encouraged to sing and become part of
Anna on the other hand is active in witness by word
- this from Luke 2:38
She spoke about the child Jesus to everyone who hoped for Jerusalem to be set free

Anna was a model of faithfulness

- regular in attendance, supportive in worship and prayer
when she saw the baby Jesus she instantly recognised what God was doing
she gave thanks that God had now provided the long hoped for Saviour
- and she did not keep this Good News to herself
this was no secret to be hoarded and enjoyed in private
it was a treasure for all the world
- Anna spoke to anyone and everyone who would listen
and a few who wouldn't
- she is so full of joy at having met Jesus, God with her
that it just bubbled out, she couldn't help herself ...

Simeon, Anna

- two more people added to that small unlikely band who had met the Saviour
Anna, Simeon, elderly of no rank or social standing
ignored as they went about their business
- yet through them the Good News began to spread

Simeon and Anna represent ordinary people

- those waiting, looking, hoping, praying for God to act
people who have nothing else
- no politician's ear, no blue chip shares, no gold as a hedge against inflation
no nest egg or insurance policy, no one looking out for their interests ...
- except God

With the birth of this baby, Jesus

- now brought to Jerusalem
- Simeon and Anna recognise God is doing something new and wonderful
- so they give thanks and praise to God
- and spread the news

Unusual, odd, unbelievable

- illogical though this news must have seemed to many
- the news began to spread
- through ordinary people like Anna and Simeon
- those ordinary common folk so easily overlooked or forgotten
- those whom the world rejects as of no consequence and no value
- this is the basic principle by which God works
- this is the continuing message of Good News

The message for us is:

- turn and look again at that small unlikely band who have met the Saviour
- the very young, the very old, the simple
- do not despair: REJOICE!
- look around and see one another
- this is the soil where the Gospel is sown
- and where, by God's grace, it will yet bear fruit
- let us take our place alongside Anna and Simeon
- and others whose names are forgotten but whose faith is not
- and affirm that salvation has come in this little one

We in our day are invited to speak about this child who is 'God with us'

- who shares all aspects of life
- living and growing just like we did and are doing
- who calls us to respond
- so I invite you to reflect on what this means for you
- as we listen to this version of Simeon's song:
- "Now that I've held Him in My Arms" by Michael Card [Handout]

How will you "take him in your arms" ... ???

For our affirmation this morning let us stand and say together
'The Song of Simeon' (NZPB p.78)