

First Sunday after Christmas Dec. 27, 2020 Trinity UMC

During this Advent and Christmas season, we have been noticing what different people said about the birth of Jesus and how God came to earth 2020 some years ago...to a small Middle Eastern land, Israel, that the Roman Empire ruled. Yes, God came in the form of a little Jewish baby to fulfill the promises and prophecies of old. And people in the Bible had a lot to say about that!

Today, we will hear what Anna said. She was an elderly widow, devoted to praying and serving God in the Jerusalem Temple. Let's listen to how it's written in the Gospel of Luke.

Scripture Luke 2: 22 – 38 (Contemporary English Version)

The time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the Law of Moses says a mother is supposed to do after her baby is born.^[a]

They took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem and presented him to the Lord, ²³ just as the Law of the Lord says, "Each first-born^[a] baby boy belongs to the Lord." ²⁴ The Law of the Lord also says that parents have to offer a sacrifice, giving at least a pair of doves or two young pigeons. So that is what Mary and Joseph did.

²⁵ At this time a man named Simeon was living in Jerusalem. Simeon was a good man. He loved God and was waiting for God to save the people of Israel. God's Spirit came to him ²⁶ and told him that he would not die until he had seen Christ the Lord.

²⁷ When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to do what the Law of Moses says should be done for a new baby, the Spirit told Simeon to go into the temple. ²⁸ Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God,

²⁹ "Lord, I am your servant,
and now I can die in peace,
because you have kept
your promise to me.

³⁰ With my own eyes I have seen
what you have done
to save your people,

³¹ and foreign nations
will also see this.

³² Your mighty power is a light
for all nations,
and it will bring honor
to your people Israel."

³³ Jesus' parents were surprised at what Simeon had said. ³⁴ Then he blessed them and told Mary, "This child of yours will cause many people in Israel to fall and others to stand. The child will be like a warning sign. Many people will reject him, ³⁵ and you, Mary, will suffer as though you had been stabbed by a dagger. But all this will show what people are really thinking."

³⁶ The prophet Anna was also there in the temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. In her youth she had been married for seven years, but her husband died. ³⁷ And now she was eighty-four years old. Night and day she served God in the temple by praying and often going without eating.

³⁸ She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph. She saw the baby Jesus and she praised God. She spoke about the child Jesus to everyone who hoped for Jerusalem to be set free.

The words of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God

Message of Peace *'What Anna Said'*

What did Anna say? We read that:

She praised God.

She spoke about the baby Jesus to everyone who had hopes that the Jewish people would be set free from the Roman Empire.

So we know generally what she said. And we know who she said it to.

But we don't know exactly what words she used or how she described what she had seen.

Which is not unusual. In the Bible writings we read a lot, A LOT, about what the men have to say. Like Simeon... There are 7 verses of what Simeon, the man at the Temple had to say to Mary and Joseph about Jesus.

But not so much about what Anna had to say.

You may wonder why then, would I preach about what Anna said? When we don't even know exactly what she said?

I lift up Anna to you today because everyone in the Bible, is in the Bible, because they are important in some way.

Each person mentioned in the Bible has something to teach us about God...and about how we can live as those who were created and loved by God.

And each person mentioned in the Bible has something to show us about the love and the power and grace of Jesus...who is God with us.

If all we did was concentrate on the people in the Bible who had a lot to say, we just might miss something really important that God wants us to know.

Like Anna...a widow. An 80 something year old widow. Those oldest widows are a very, very special group of people...in the Bible and in the world. I bet we are worshiping right this minute with women in that special group.

I don't have statistics but my instinct is that many, many churches in the 2020s in America have a lot of widows in their 80s. Faithful and good women who were raised in the church, married in the church, brought up their children in their church.

Without even looking at our church directory, I can name a dozen or more Trinity Unique women who take great comfort and find lots of enjoyment in the way God is visible through our church.

I have watched the women of this church surround newly widowed women with kindness and companionship and laughter and tears. I imagine them reminding each other that God is with us. That their deceased husband has gone to be with Jesus. And that there is life after death.

I also see the 80 plus year old widows of this church sending cards and meeting for lunch. I see them serving and raising money for Missions and singing in the choir. I saw them making cards for the Children's Advent Activity bags this year!

Widows today are definitely not in the church night and day like Anna was...especially in this pandemic with the building closed and all. But there are women in this church who remember the younger days when they were at the church all the time...for 50th anniversary celebrations, for VBS, for the October mini-fair. There are women who tell me they used to think about bringing a cot to church to stay over night because of all the time they spent here.

Anna, in her two or three short verses...is a reflection of all those good women that we have known. She is a role model, a reminder that God doesn't forget the widows. God doesn't ignore those whose words are never recorded. We are all precious in God's eyes and we all have something of value to contribute to God's church and to God's world.

The most peaceful, grace-filled widows I have ever known...some of whom are gone now, no doubt, but those who I know and remember...Those precious women, as they live out their final days and years with us...They, like Anna, give thanks and praise to God. Yes, they may wonder why they are still here...They may be tired of aging and the physical problems that go with that but...by the power of the Holy Spirit, through years of growing in love for God, they maintain a gratitude greater than their troubles. They have the gift of thankfulness to God that they speak of in simple and clear words.

That may well be some of what Anna said too. Can you imagine: 'I may be old and tired and worn out but I still see God at work in the world. And today...' Can you imagine, Anna seeing that baby Jesus, carried by Mary and protected by Joseph, and saying 'Hallelujah, Praise the Lord. He is here among us. Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king!'

Who knows...that may be exactly what Anna said!

And she didn't stop there. Even after Mary and Joseph moved out of the Temple to take the baby Jesus home, Anna kept talking about Emmanuel...God with us. And she knew just who she wanted to talk to. Yes, She talked with everyone who hoped to be set free. In that time, there were those in Jerusalem who wanted to be set free from the Roman Empire. Anna went to them and we don't know exactly what she said but it may have been along these lines...'The Messiah has come and God's work will be done, in Israel and throughout the whole world.'

Maybe Anna quoted Isaiah 62: 1
For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her justice/vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

Maybe she said: *Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given. Praise be to God. For the babe is the one who will restore our fortunes, set free the captives, bring sight to the blind and cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. His authority shall grow continually and there shall be endless peace.*

Maybe that's what Anna said?

Anna knew that she would not live to see the Babe full grown but she did not let that stop her from sharing the joy of her hopes fulfilled with those who were on the verge of giving up or of taking matters into their own hands—rather than waiting on the Lord to lead them in to truth and peace and better days ahead.

What Anna said is as important for us, as it was for the people of her time. She was saying that we might not live to see the fulfillment of all that God has planned but the birth of Jesus is God's way of saying...I'm here. You're going to be OK no matter what happens next because there is no way to stop the triumph of the Lord in this world and the next.

Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. Grace and truth. Anna knew that those gifts were real and she shared them as a gift to any who would listen. That is the ultimate gift of Christmas, isn't it? Something that God gives us...so that we have enough to give away. The gift of knowing that we never have to give up on God because God will never give up on us. Like Anna would say....Thanks be to God...Amen.