



Sunday Reflection

Season of Epiphany

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 31 January 2021

Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Epiphany 4

Today we remember the Presentation of Christ at the Temple and two people who waited a long time for God –Simeon and Anna. They kept on trusting God's promises would be realised and they were proved right. God is faithful, so let us come together and rejoice.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah." Luke 2:26

An Illustration to set the scene

None of us finds waiting easy, whether it's waiting for a new job, a house move that goes wobbly or falls through, or guidance when our prayers appear to bounce off the walls.

We may think that biblical characters never had to wait like us for God to act and probably had stronger faith than us, and so saw instant answers to their prayers.

However, a closer reading of the Bible shows that this is far from the case.

King David, for instance, had to wait many years for the crown God had promised him, enduring persistent persecution from King Saul for much of that time.

And the apostle Paul may have been called by God to be missionary to the Gentiles, but he too had to wait a number of years before he began his famous missionary journeys and spent some of the intervening time in obscurity in Arabia and Damascus.

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that the expression “wait for the Lord” is common in the Bible, especially in the psalms, reflecting the fact that God does not always act as quickly as we would like. In today’s reading we learn about two more characters who had to wait a long time to see God’s promises fulfilled.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Luke emphasises the Jewish background to this story. He shows Mary and Joseph carefully following the requirements of the Jewish Law, offering a sacrifice of doves for Mary’s purification after childbirth just as Leviticus required, and also fulfilling the Law in Numbers, which demanded that five silver coins were paid to buy back or “redeem” from God a firstborn son.

Luke describes this ritual because he wants to root Jesus firmly in Judaism as he seeks to show Christ as the fulfilment of the Jewish scriptures (our Old Testament).

He goes on to do this through Simeon and Anna, who see Jesus as the messianic figure they are awaiting: the one their scriptures, such as the prophecies of Isaiah, point to. They and other Jews had been waiting patiently for this messiah for a very long time, although there were differing views on what he would be like.

One popular hope was that he would be a kingly warrior who would defeat their Roman oppressors and set up a political kingdom like King David's.

Simeon's words to Mary, however, offer the first indications that Jesus' messiahship will not bring worldly power and success: he describes Jesus as "a sign that will be opposed" and warns that a sword will pierce Mary's soul, foreshadowing Jesus' terrible death in which he will be crucified by the Romans rather than overthrow them.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

So what can we learn about waiting for God to act?

Firstly, we can wait with hope and not fear. God can be trusted to act at the right time. Anna and Simeon have to wait for God, but the Lord eventually answers their prayers. God does not work to our time frame, but we can trust in God's love for us and be assured that if God seems slow to respond, there is a good reason why.

Secondly, when God does answer our prayers, it may not always be in ways we expect, but will always be for our best. Many hoped for a military messiah but were sent a suffering one instead. Today we can appreciate how important that was, for Christ's suffering means that he understands our struggles and his death brings us forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Thirdly, Anna and Simeon stay close to God as they wait, praying and fasting. It is easy to drift away from God and become bitter when the Lord does not seem to be acting. Prayer can be particularly hard at such times and we can be tempted to give up. However, if we are honest in prayer about our struggles and feelings, such times can bring us closer to God. We will not

always understand God's ways, but we can receive the strength to keep trusting if we lean on the Lord rather than going it alone.

“It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.” Luke 2:26

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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