



Sunday Reflection Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time



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

For Sunday 31 December 2023

Christmas 1

at St Johns the Curate will preach

On the first Sunday after Christmas, we remember that God keeps God's promises and that we are people who are used to singing praise to God for the blessings we receive.

Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word (Luke 2.29)

An illustration to set the scene

Have you ever imagined which eight tracks you would pick if you were on Desert Island Discs? I expect that it is not hard to think of songs that have been important in our lives but hard to discard some. No doubt though that the one we would keep above all the others is an easy choice, probably because of its deeply personal associations as much as for its musical qualities.

The memory of songs is often intimately bound up with memories of important moments in our lives. And science has established that the capacity for music lasts when other neurological capacities fail.

You only have to start a familiar hymn in a care home to see the truth of that. People remember the words long after other memories have gone.

And that's the reason behind the work of the charity, Playlist for Life, started by Sally Magnusson because of her experience with her own mother. The idea is that you help someone you love to draw up a playlist of their favourite songs, so that if memory fades, they can be stimulated, calmed and just given sheer pleasure by hearing the familiar words and tunes.

And there are remarkable and moving stories of the effects-of people rediscovering the joy of being able to rock and roll or croon again as they hear the familiar tunes. I fear I may in my later years be moved to recreate The Twist!

Today's Gospel Teaching

Mary and Joseph were observant Jews. 40 days after the birth of Jesus they go up to the Jerusalem Temple for the ceremony at which a firstborn son is redeemed. Under the Levitical Law, all were offered to the priesthood unless a sum was paid to redeem them. The scenario emphasises the holiness of Jesus' vocation. As well of course as the Jewishness of his family upbringing. (Luke, a gentile, conflates the occasion with the ceremony of the purification of the mother after a birth).

The feats of the Presentation (which we will keep on 4 February) is known in the Greek Church as the Feast of the Encounter because of the significant meetings with Simeon and Anna who recognise and confirm who the baby Jesus is, the fulfilment of the longed-for hope of a Redemer.

Simeon's words. *'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word,'* are all the more powerful by being uttered by an old, faithful man at the end of his life on earth. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he is drawn to the Temple, meets the holy family and takes the baby in his arms. We are told that he had been longing for the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, that

Israel would be redeemed and he himself had been promised that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. So, when he recognises who Jesus is he is filled with praise. Greeting death with joy was far from the norm at that time. Simeon recognises that Jesus' arrival brings something revolutionary as well as the fulfilment of the long-held expectations of his own people. Jesus will be the glory of the Jewish nation, but also the light for all people the world over.

How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?

The words we know as *The Song of Simeon* make up the last of the four songs of the birth narrative in the Gospel of Luke.

The first is the Magnificat, the song that Mary sings when her cousin Elizabeth's baby jumps in the womb at recognition of the Christ child in her own (Luke 1.46-55):

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.*

Her words recall those that Hannah's sang as she offered her son Samuel to serve the Lord in the Temple (1 Samuel 2.1-10). Like the words of Simeon, Mary's offer praise to God at the blessing God has shown in fulfilling the ancient promise. And like Simeon's they suggest that the coming of Jesus will bring disruption and a threat to the powerful that will be a blessing to some and be strongly resisted by others.

The second song is Zechariah's at the circumcision of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1.68-79). We know it as the Benedictus:

*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty saviour for us
in the house of his servant David.*

And the third song is that the angels in heaven sang at the announcement of Jesus' birth (Luke 2.14)

*'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'*

Now these may not have been your first picks for your 'Playlist for Life' but they are, if you like, top of the worship playlist, embedded in our prayer for centuries.

The Magnificat is one of the earliest Christian hymns, part of prayer in the evening. We sing the Gloria every Sunday and it has been part of the liturgy since the 4th century. Every morning we say the Benedictus at Morning Prayer and the Nunc Dimittis, Simeon's song, part of night prayer since the 4th century is associated with some of the most poignant moments of our lives as it said at funerals.

What do these songs say about us as a worshipping community?
What memories and truths do they hold that we will not forget,
whatever else passes away?

That we belong to a people who wait expectantly for God's redemption of the world.

That we are full of praise for the grace shown to us personally.

That we recognise God at work in our lives and in the world,
knowing that the struggle for goodness and justice will have a cost.

That, we can end our lives in joy, confident of God's mercy.

And that the light that Christ brought into the world shines not just for us but for all.

So, in singing them time after time throughout our lives we remember that God keeps his promises and that we ourselves as God's beloved children.

And by the way, do make your own Playlist.

Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word (Luke 2.29)

at St Margarets Rev Godfred will preach his last homily with us

“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... (Luke 2:27-30)”

This passage from Luke recounts Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the Temple to be presented to the Lord in accordance with the law of Moses, and to offer their sacrifice as written in the Law of the Lord. At that time there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. He was looking forward to the consolation of Israel and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Simeon was guided by the Holy Spirit into the temple, and when he saw the baby Jesus he took him and praised the God. This shows the important role of the Holy Spirit which is the power of God in leading people to the truth and the salvation of God, for those who worship God must do so in spirit and truth. For those who are born of the spirit overcomes the flesh and its desires. The prophet Anna, an eighty-four years old widow who never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day sharing in the joy of sing the salvation of the world shows that age and gender are not barriers in knowing the Lord.

Simeon song of praise reminds believers of the continuous work of God's redemptive plan throughout history for human salvation that comes through Jesus Christ and the recognition of His salvation is not only for Israel, but for all nations. For Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to his people Israel. The universal scope of God's plan of redemption, reinforces the idea that God's love and salvation are meant for everyone.

Paul in Galatians 4:4-7 provides insight into the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the transformative impact it has on believers. On quote; "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman,

born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive Salvation and adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." The phrase "when the fullness of time had come" emphasizes the divine timing of God's plan. It suggests that God's intervention through the incarnation of Jesus occurred at the perfect moment in history. This reflects God's sovereignty and careful orchestration of events for the fulfilment of His redemptive purpose. The passage underscores the humanity of Jesus, emphasizing that He was "born of woman" and "born under the law." This highlights Jesus' identification with humanity, as He entered the world subject to the same laws and experiences. The transformative impact of Jesus' redemptive work is expressed through the concept of adoption, as a result of God's grace. As adopted children, believers become heirs and beneficiaries of God's promises having the "Spirit of his Son" which enables us to cry out, "Abba! Father!" This intimate expression reflects the newfound relationship with God as Father, made possible through the atoning work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit serves as a witness and a source of assurance of this adoption, bringing about the transformation from being slaves to becoming sons and daughters of God. Paul recounts the essence of the gospel by emphasizing the incarnation, redemption, adoption, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which invites believers to reflect on the richness of God's grace, the freedom found in Christ, and the privilege of being adopted into God's family. The transformative power of the gospel shows the depth of God's love, our hope, peace, faith and the joy of believers who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ to overcome the challenges of 2024.

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