

We've all been to a movie theater, and we have all seen the previews, the trailers for coming attractions—which give us a two- or three-minute taste of what is to come. That is what Luke is doing here with these stories of Jesus as a child. They help ground the story of Jesus of Nazareth in the rest of the gospel.

Read Luke 2:22-40

The time is 40 days after Jesus' birth. Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus come to the temple in Jerusalem. The reason they come is two-fold: for Mary to share in the ritual of purification after childbirth; and for Jesus (as first-born son) to be dedicated to God.

And it is here in the Temple that Mary and Joseph encounter two people—not priests, not crowds flocking to the baby, not governmental leaders—just two relatively unknown people with their eyes fixed on one thing: the newborn King.

First, we meet Simeon. Simeon is a faithful, devout Jewish man who is guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had spoken to Simeon, telling him that he would not die before he would meet the long-awaited Messiah. On this particular day, God's Spirit guides him to the temple where he meets the child Jesus and his parents.

Simeon proclaims: "in this child my eyes have seen your salvation, and that salvation given is for all people— both Jew and Gentile." Simeon also reminds the parents and all who are listening that this child will be a cause of conflict and division—that not everyone will welcome Jesus and his message.

The second person Mary and Joseph meet is a woman of faith named Anna. A widow and at 84 years old, she has spent most of her lifetime in the temple, fasting and praying, worshipping God. Anna continues the theme of Simeon by praising God and speaking about the child to all who had come looking for the “redemption of Jerusalem.”

In Simeon and Anna, we meet faithful human beings who are grounded in the community of God’s people and through whom God announces that the Kingdom has come. In Simeon and Anna, we meet people who also understand that there is a cross in this story as well.

Taking everything into consideration, this story is a story of hope. It is about an elderly man who says he can die in peace now because he has seen the Messiah; it is about two parents at peace because as they bring their little one before the Lord, they know that God will watch over him. It is about Anna praising God and encouraging everyone in the synagogue because they no longer had to wait for the redemption of Israel. There is hope and hope is alive!

Theologian Fred Craddock writes of Simeon and Anna blessing Jesus: “God is doing something new, but it is not really new, because hope is always joined to memory, and the new is God’s keeping an old promise.”<sup>1</sup> For Simeon and Anna, Jesus represents their dreams fulfilled, but this moment is only the beginning for the rest of us.

1. Fred B. Craddock. *Interpretation: Luke*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990. 40.

There is good news and bad news this day. The good news is that we have made it through the Christmas season with all the shopping, baking, mailing of cards and gifts, wrapping of presents and cleaning up the unwrapping of presents, and 2020 is almost over!

Christmas does signify the end of something. It is the end of Advent, the end of the waiting.

And we can see this ending of the period of waiting within the stories of the two prophets who see Jesus. Simeon has been living out his own personal Advent season, and not just for four weeks, but for...well... it doesn't really say for how long, but the inflection in the text makes it feel like it's been a long time.

He has been waiting for the coming of the salvation of the Lord, something God has told him he will see before he dies, and kind of sounds like he's ready to move on because of this day.

Anna too, she's been waiting, spending all her days waiting for the day when she would see the glory of the Lord present among us. And though not specifically noted, it seems she was waiting for this moment as a green light to then go and share what she has seen and knows about this baby. For both these people, their season of waiting has come to an end.

But it's not the end of the story, and here's where I share that bad news I was telling you about earlier. We tend to look forward to this time, after Christmas, after Advent. Because now all the hectic insanity that has become associated with Christmas is

over, and we think we can finally get some rest. At least that is the way I feel at times and I think Ashley would agree with me.

Advent may be over, but in many ways, Advent is just the prologue, the prequel, now is when the real story begins, now is when the real adventures begin, now the real work begins.

This is the story of Jesus:

- going to the temple of the first time through the purification ceremony, he is beginning life within the context of Jewish religion and society.
- this is the mark of the beginning of his real journey.
- a journey that will see him baptized by John.
- the journey of his three years of ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem.
- and the journey that will eventually take him to the cross on Calvary, and in this story, we get a little taste of what is to come.

Simeon prophesies for the holy family, he tells them a little bit about what is ahead for the little baby Jesus. Verses 34-35: “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the thoughts of many will be revealed-and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

This story marks the beginning of the life and in some ways the ministry of Jesus, and during this season, it can be seen as marking the beginning of our taking part with Jesus in that life in ministry.

Morgan Freeman said it best in the movie Shawshank Redemption: “you either get busy living or get busy dying.” Well this is where that living starts. The season after Advent.

We can see this in the reaction that the prophetess Anna has when she first comes in contact with Jesus. She had spent all that time waiting, in the temple all of her days, but when the Savior came the waiting came to an end, and she leaves the temple and goes out amongst the people, praising God, and spreading the good news.

It is at this point, that for the first time in many years, Anna began to truly start living again.

The thing that she has been waiting for finally happens, and she is finally free to live life to the fullest, and she does live life fully. She no longer has her eyes fixed on the future, all the while life passing her by, at long last she can start to live the life that God has intended her to live all along.

Friends our waiting time is over as well. The season of Advent has passed but we are not to sit by and watch as a New Year approaches. It is time for us to go and get busy living. To dream big and to work towards fulfilling the dreams we have, and the dreams God has for us!

God’s dreams are not for us alone. Simeon and Anna could not keep silent—they witnessed Jesus’ divine presence in the temple and were compelled to speak up. Like the prophet Isaiah, we will

not keep silent and we will not rest until what has been sown will spring up as righteousness and peace in every nation.