

## Waiting Well

Luke 2:22-38

### Introduction

**Waiting:** Maybe the central theme of the Christmas story is **waiting**. It even shows up in the annual wait to open presents. It's a good picture (and a fun little torture) to put presents under the tree and tell kids, "You have to wait" (e.g., Gary vomit story).

**Bad at Waiting:** We are bad at waiting. It is both human nature and a particular problem in our society. We want everything instantly. We want search results, online orders, and food fast.

- Mom unwrapping and re-wrapping presents (had to wait until her birthday to wear her new clothes). The punishment was to *wait longer* (might be worse!).

Have you ever ordered something valuable and gotten a notification of a delivery day and time? You wait all day, listening for the door, then finally you can't wait any longer, and you leave the house and right the item is delivered as soon as you leave (I think there is some sort of digital tracking device and they do it on purpose).

- Imagine waiting your whole life for something, then giving up or getting distracted right when it arrives and missing it!

The Christmas story tells us that the wait is over, the Savior has finally come. From two aged saints in today's passage, we learn how to wait so we don't miss Jesus when he shows up.

**Waiting well helps you see Jesus clearly so you don't miss him when he finally arrives.**

<sup>22</sup> And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." <sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." <sup>36</sup> And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and

day.<sup>38</sup> And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

**Setting the Scene:** We see a simple scene of Mary and Joseph, two faithful parents (“they”) taking their child up to Jerusalem to dedicate him to the Lord, for various rituals (both for the firstborn and for his mother) according to Jewish Scripture and custom.<sup>1</sup> “Mary and Joseph obey the law of the Lord and dedicate Jesus to the service of the Lord.”

- They brought a simple sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (a reminder of their poverty). \*Ever wonder why “two turtldoves” are symbolic of Christmas (cf. Home Alone 2, “12 Days of Christmas,” etc.). I’m still not sure what a partridge is or why it’s in a pear tree.

**Focus:** That is the **background** of this moment but not the **focus**. The focus is on these two people that greet this young family: Simeon and Anna.

- **Simeon:** A righteous and devout man; common name (one of Jacob’s sons); no description of vocation (not a priest); filled with the HS; a prophet (receives a confirmed word from God): And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.<sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple.
- **Anna** (“Hannah,” rough breathing mark): A woman of devotion; very old (either 84 or 105, Gr. unclear)<sup>2</sup>; A prophetess (in a long line of prophetess’ in Jewish history<sup>3</sup> and the Hebrew Bible<sup>4</sup>).

**Waiting:** It describes these two faithful saints as devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. Notice how they waited:

## 1. Stay Active

**Ditches of Waiting:** Too often, it feels we only know how to wait either with **apathy** or **impatience**. Either I don’t care, or I care too much.

- Both Simeon and Anna are a picture of waiting a **long time** (she old, old). But not in despair or apathy. They continue to be faithful in worship and devotion. They don’t check out, they lean in.
- Waiting on the Lord is active. We walk in obedience, we cultivate faith, we pursue righteousness, we strive toward holiness.
- When you **actively wait** you learn that God is with you in the waiting.
  - Notice that Anna’s life is described as basically living at the temple, **worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day**.
  - This is a picture of active waiting. **Prayer and fasting is active waiting**. It’s a discipline of intentional patience.

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<sup>1</sup> Summarizing multiple ceremonies: purification of wife (Lev 12:2-4, 6), presentation of firstborn to the Lord’s service (Ex 13:2, 12, 15, 34:19). All according to the Law of Moses.

<sup>2</sup> Either she was a widow until the age of 84 or she was a widow 84 years after her husband died (14+7+84=105).

<sup>3</sup> Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.

<sup>4</sup> Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah, and Isaiah’s wife.

- It's not trying to ignore the difficulty of waiting or distract yourself from the problem, it is learning to sit with God in the midst of the season of waiting.
  - **A lot of us need to learn what it looks like to be present with the Lord in our season of waiting.**
- Waiting is like tending a garden. The seed is planted, and you water, prune, and weed the ground. You **cultivate** the garden. And, at the right time, if you're paying attention, you'll reap the reward of the fruit. If you eat it too soon, it is not ripe, not ready. If you wait too long, it spoils.
- God isn't asking you to ignore the pain, or distract yourself from the problem, but to faithful worship him as you wait. Learn to walk with him.
  - Did you know that a sedentary lifestyle is a silent killer? Inactivity spikes cholesterol levels, blood pressure, blood sugar, and more. Sedentary behavior is actually more dangerous than being overweight (but it also makes you overweight). The same is true for mental acuity, the NIH found that reading, extracurricular activities, and hobbies are associated with a lower risk of dementia.<sup>5</sup> When you retire, you don't stop living, or you die.
  - The same is true of your faith. When you stop walking by faith, you start stagnating spiritually. A spiritually sedentary lifestyle weakens your vision of God. In the waiting seasons, it's crucial not to put your faith on hold but to actively engage with God through prayer, scripture, and worship.

**Silent Years:** God isn't gone in the midst of our waiting, he is right there with us. There is this myth going around about "the silent years" between the OT and the NT. \*There are lots of Christmas myths: three gifts, not necessarily three wise men; Mary on a donkey to Bethlehem; Xmas is not a modern thing; the best gift to give the parents of a newborn is a drum solo, etc.\* The reality is this, God never stopped speaking to his people: <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit (was led by the Spirit) into the temple...

- The Spirit never stopped speaking, too many people just weren't listening. But those who were listening, worshipping, and walking in faith were able to see clearly when God showed up.
  - A lot of you spend time praying, thinking you just need to keep praying until God hears you. But that's not the point. **Don't pray until God hears you, pray until you hear God.**
- **To see God clearly, we need to be led by the Spirit and not by our own desires and expectations.**
- Maybe you think God is silent, absent, not paying attention to you. That is not the case. He is a God who sees, hears, and speaks. **Is it possible that maybe you're too busy doing your own thing to listen?**

## 2. See Clearly

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2911991/>

**Expect the Unexpected:** It seems only Anna and Simeon **noticed the messiah in their midst**. Of the hundreds of people at the temple that day, only two of them recognized the messiah. How could so many read the Hebrew Bible, worship at the temple, and pray for God's restoration, only to miss him when he was in the flesh, in front of them?

- **God had prophesied a savior to come at a certain time, in a certain place, to a certain type of family but everyone missed it.** They expected the royal lineage but didn't see the unwed teenager. They expected the military leader but not the suffering servant.

How can so many people hear, "Peace on earth, and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled // Veiled in flesh the Godhead see / Hail the incarnate deity // Mild he lays his glory by / Born that man no more may die / Born to raise the sons of earth / Born to give them second birth" over the speakers at Target and miss Jesus? How could so many people call themselves Christians and miss Jesus? How can people walk by church after church on street corner after street corner and miss Jesus? It's not that he's hiding it's that **they're not looking or they're not seeing clearly**.

- (1) Some miss Jesus because they're **distracted**. They have business in the **temple** and walk right past the Savior of the world. **How many of us are too distracted to see Jesus?**
- (2) Some miss Jesus because they're rebellious. Think of **Herod** wanting to be king of his own world, so rather than worship the King of Kings he tried to kill him. **How many of us would rather fight Jesus for control than surrender to his loving rule?**
- (3) Some miss Jesus because he's **unexpected**. Everyone expected a **king** and a **military leader**, no one expected a baby born to an unwed teenager.
  - "He was not the King they expected. He wasn't like the monarchs of old who sat on their jeweled ivory thrones... Nor was he the great warrior-king some had wanted" (Wright)
  - "There was much Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would 'redeem' Israel from Roman tyranny and even purify his people, whether by fiat or appeal to law... But there was no expectation that the Davidic messiah would give his own life as a ransom to save his people from their sins" (Carson).
  - Even Simeon tells Mary and Joseph that Jesus' life will not be without difficulty: <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."
  - The first Christmas isn't a story of unbridled happiness, a cute little 6lb 8oz baby in golden fleece diapers, and a Thomas Kinkadee stable that smells like a cranberry peppermint Yankee Candle. The story of Christmas is the story of God bringing hope into a very dark and messed up world. Jesus didn't come in the form people expected. His redemption wasn't going to look as neat and clean as people thought. He was going to divide Israel down the middle. Those who believed would find life and those who rejected would be destroyed. And he was going to invite the whole world in on this deal!

- He was going to answer the prayers of many but in a way very different than anyone expected.
  - If there's not room in your life for God to surprise you, to work differently than you expected then maybe (likely) it's not God you're worshiping, but yourself.
- **When you let go of your expectations and demands of God, you make room to see and embrace all the other better things he is doing.**
- When we have the wrong idea of God, the things he does frustrate us. But when we see him for who he is and trust him for what he's doing, we humbly follow and joyfully receive him.
- I don't want you to miss Jesus.

The worst thing that could happen is that we, like many people of Jesus' day, have all the information and the signs all around us, but we miss what God is doing or (worse yet) we miss Jesus himself!

**A Life Well-Lived:** You can only imagine that all of these people saw this old woman at the temple and had pity on her. They could only think her life must have been wasted. All she ever did was worship, fast, and pray. She had no family, no retirement, nothing to show for her life.

- The irony is that she didn't waste a second because she saw the Savior and they all missed him (cf. Noah).
- Simeon held the treasure of all treasures, the King of all Kings, the Savior of all humanity in his arms.
  - But you'll never walk the faithful path and wait with joy if the end goal isn't Jesus. Jesus has to be the treasure worth selling everything else to have.
  - What we have to offer at RH isn't an easy life, or material blessing, or even trouble-free relationships, but the greatest joy of all, the Savior who made you and wants to re-make you in his image.
- What a beautiful way to live, with joyful, humble, expectant anticipation. It opens us to see what **God** is doing and join him in his work.

**Worth the Wait:** We just don't wait well. We want it now or not at all, and **so we miss out on the best thing** (even though we know the best things in life are worth the wait). Cf. relationship, a promotion, family, achievement, health, stability, etc. So much of sin is giving up on God's long-term best for Satan's short-term pleasure.

- When Jesus came, all the waiting was worth it. When Jesus comes again to take you to the place he has prepared for you, to be in his presence for eternity, all the waiting will be worth it.
- Advent means salvation is here.
  - Cancer has an expiration date. Murder has an expiration date. Loneliness has an expiration date. Abuse has an expiration. Darkness, death, disease, and pain have an expiration date.
  - So we wait with **joy**.

## Conclusion

**Sharing:** And that's a joy worth sharing. Simeon describes Jesus as a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel. And when he and Anna saw the light, they were compelled to share it. Anna at that very hour... began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. The light of the gospel shines in their hearts and they reflect that light to the watching world.

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Jesus is the light of the world, and for those who believe in him, he calls us to reflect that light into a lost and dying world. He doesn't come to the comfortable and easy places, he goes to dark and distant places. He enters into darkness and brings light to all who would believe in him. Jesus doesn't look at the brokenness of the world and turn away, he runs toward it. As his followers, we have the privilege to do the same thing. "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). "The church should not say, 'Look what the world is coming to!' They should say, 'Look what has come into the world'" (Carl Henry, *adapted*). "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:14-16).

As I light this candle, a picture of the light of Jesus, and we sing, this light will spread from person to person, reminding us of our joy in sharing Jesus with everyone we meet from Philadelphia to the ends of the earth. As Jesus shines in our hearts, we let our lights shine.

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With Jesus as our true light, as lights into the world, Redemption Heights Church, you are sent.