

# Sermon Charlestown and Swansea 12 Jan 2025

## Luke 2:22-38 Waiting for Jesus

### SLIDE 1

I moved from New Zealand to Australia when I was fourteen and one of my new school friends took me to watch my first game of Rugby League between his team, South Sydney, and the St George Dragons. Even though St George lost that game, I became an avid supporter that day and have been ever since. It helped that I lived in Kogarah, a short walk to Jubilee oval.

In the first five years after I started supporting them, St George played in three Grand Finals and won two of them, and I was at those grand finals. I thought it was great, and that I had picked the right team to barrack for. St George was already one of the most successful teams in the league, having won eleven consecutive premierships between 1956 and 1966, and they looked on course to win many more.

### SLIDE 2

But then the waiting began. 31 years long wait! During those 31 years St George made it into five more Grand Finals but lost all of them, until, finally, in 2010 they won. The coach of that team, Wayne Bennett, said that "This premiership is really about the "true believers." I guess by that he meant that the winning of this grand final was dedicated to all those supporters who had kept barracking for St George while waiting through the 31 years. And maybe it's only "true believers" who are prepared to wait to see whatever it is they are waiting for happen.

Waiting is a theme in the Bible. In it we read that people waited for God to act, to answer prayers, to fulfil prophecies, to honour promises. Some like Noah and his family waited for him to send a flood and then waited for him to make it go away again. Some like Abraham and Sarah waited for him to give them a child, a son who would be a blessing and part of God's plan to build a great nation. Some like Moses and the Israelites waited for God to deliver them from Egypt and take them into the promised. Some like the prophets were persecuted while they waited, and many of them died before the things they prophesied and were waiting for ever happened. Some waited for God to send a Messiah, a person who they thought, wrongly, would deliver them from the oppression of conquerors and occupiers of their land.

These people were waiting on God, expecting and anticipating the he would do what he had promised. They could pray or sing like the psalmist in Psalm 130:5, "[I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.](#)"

In our story from Luke chapter 2, Simeon and Anna, two faithful people, two true believers, like those who preceded them in the Old Testament, had been waiting years and years for the Messiah. They were willing to wait and do what was needed to have an encounter with Jesus.

Let's have a look at the story of Simeon and Anna's waiting and encounter with Jesus.

### SLIDE 3

**Luke 2:22-24** And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they [i.e. Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph] brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." (ESV)

Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem according to the Jewish law, and we can note two things from this passage. Firstly, Joseph and Mary were devout in their beliefs and behaviour. They respected and obeyed the teachings of their religion.

And secondly, we know that they were poor. The law, as recorded in Leviticus 12:6 & 8, stipulated that a mother "... shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting [in this case, the Temple] a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering ... And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering."

So Mary and Joseph had to take the second option of two birds, because they were poor and they could not afford to buy a lamb. It's interesting to note that while they couldn't afford to buy a lamb for this offering, they were actually holding the Lamb of God, who would become an offering for the forgiveness of sins (John 1:28-29, 35-36).

**25-27a** 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. 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. And he came in the Spirit into the temple...

A man named Simeon had been waiting for the consolation of Israel. What does 'waiting for the consolation of Israel' mean? Well, basically it means that he was waiting for God to send his Messiah (in Hebrew) or Christ (in Greek) and that the Messiah/Christ would bring comfort and salvation to the people and to bring God's Kingdom to earth.

And the prophets in the Old Testament foretold of this consolation. For example, Isaiah wrote about the consolation, the promised Messiah, in Isaiah chapter 61 — and then Jesus used Isaiah's

very words at the beginning of his ministry to declare that the waiting was over and that God's promised Messiah had come and was actually standing in front of them. Jesus said, quoting Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me [Jesus] because he has anointed me [Jesus] to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me [Jesus] to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1-2a)

Simeon had been waiting for this Messiah, the one foretold by the prophet Isaiah, the one who would be Jesus. Our passage says that it had been revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. So he at least knew that his waiting would not be in vain. He would get to see the promised Messiah that he and others were waiting for.

Did you notice that it was the Holy Spirit who revealed this to him? In fact, in these three verses the Holy Spirit is mentioned three times. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit didn't come for the first time at Pentecost. The truth is the Holy Spirit was working all through history. As one of the three persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit was with the Father and the Son at Creation.

In the Old Testament, the kings Saul and David were both anointed with the Holy Spirit — along with judges and prophets and other people of God. Before Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon certain people at certain times for certain purposes and we only have to go back one chapter in Luke to see that Mary, Elizabeth and John the Baptist were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

It was only after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven that the Holy Spirit was poured out on all believers for all time, and he would dwell with them and in them.

I'm going to return to verse 25 a bit later, but for now we'll move on with the story.

#### SLIDE 4

Verse **27b-35** ... and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he [Simeon] took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel. And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him. 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 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon said that his eyes saw God's salvation and he recognised that this salvation had come in the person of Jesus, even though Jesus was only a baby. Simeon could see the baby Jesus, and at the same time could see God's salvation for people.

And what was surprising, if not shocking, in this very Jewish story, is that a very devout Jewish man standing in the Jewish temple declared that this Jewish baby was not only going to bring salvation to the Jews, but also to the non-Jews, the Gentiles. This was very unexpected as many Jews thought that they were the only chosen people of God.

But Luke reveals to us God's plan is for all nations and, in fact, it always had been. The Jews were supposed to draw other peoples to their God. They were supposed to be a light to other nations, revealing the majesty of the One True God through their obedience and devotion to him. They didn't always do this, and now God was passing the baton to a new group of people, people who would become known as Christians, and who are to be God's light to this world and draw people to God.

Simeon blessed Joseph, Mary and Jesus, and then told Mary four things.

First, that her child, Jesus, would cause the **fall** of many people. Simeon knew that there would be people who would reject Jesus, people who would not accept Jesus and his message. And we see this play out during Jesus' own life with the attitude of many of the Jewish religious leaders and other people who rejected Jesus. But this prophecy of Simeon was not only for the people of Jesus' day, but for all those throughout history who reject Jesus, and therefore, reject the One True God. Rejecting Jesus and his message means people stay in their fallen state, in their sin, separated from God.

Thankfully, the second thing Simeon told Mary was that her child would cause the **rising** of many people. And this is good news, the good news, because there are people who accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, people who repent from their sins and receive forgiveness and salvation for their souls. They put their faith in Jesus and his Word, and though they were lost - they are now found. Though they were separated from God, they now live in relationship with him. Though they were bound to fall - they rise.

The third thing Simeon tells Mary is that Jesus would be a **Sign** — a sign for the world, pointing people to the Kingdom of God. But Simeon tells Mary that this sign would be opposed and spoken against. He foretells the future opposition to Jesus and his message, and we see the beginning of people's opposition to Jesus displayed graphically at his trial, when the people, egged on by the religious leaders, called out, "[Away with this man. Crucify him! Crucify him!](#)" But Jesus wasn't just a sign; he was the sign, the sign to the way to God. He was and is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Jesus.

And then Simeon tells Mary a fourth thing — that her soul, her **heart**, would be pierced by a sword — and we can see this happen at the foot of the cross where Jesus' mother stood with a few loyal friends; heartbroken and watching her son, Jesus, die. (John 19:25-27)

Joseph and Mary had come to the temple full of joy to present their new born baby, and they marvelled that a man like Simeon would greet them and pronounce that the baby they held in their arms would bring the joy and light and salvation that the people were desperately waiting for.

But they also heard that their child, Jesus, would cause division between people, between those who would believe in him and his message, and those who wouldn't; and his coming would mean that even some people who loved and followed him would experience suffering because of him.

Simeon had been waiting, being willing to do everything he needed to do to be ready when Jesus came to him.

And we read that there was a second person waiting to greet the family in the temple.

**36-38** 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, 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. 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.

Anna was a prophetess. There aren't many female prophets in the Bible but she is one of them. She was also a widow and had been for many, many years. And during that time she had been practically living in the temple precinct: worshipping, fasting, praying and waiting. Waiting desperately for a sign that the Messiah had come. We don't know whether she knew within herself that Jesus was the one when he arrived in the arms of Mary, or whether she knew when she saw the exchange between Mary and Simeon; but in either case she now knew for certain that Jesus was the one and she gave thanks to God. And what did she do with this information?

Well, she didn't keep it to herself — she spoke about the child to the other people who were also waiting. Once she knew who Jesus was, she wanted to tell people about him. She testified to what she knew, she testified about Jesus — and so Anna, this prophetess of Jesus, was also one of the very first evangelists for Jesus.

Anna had been waiting, being willing to do everything he needed to do to be ready when Jesus came to him.

I want to go back now to verse 25 where it says, **“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, **waiting** for the consolation of Israel.”**

The Greek word used in this passage to describe waiting (*prosdechomai*) means not to idly and lazily hang around until something happens, but it means waiting expectantly, waiting in anticipation to receive something and be given something to do.

## SLIDE 5

It's a bit like a waiter or waitress in a restaurant (i.e. before QR codes appeared on tables). His or her job is to wait on you, waiting until you are ready to tell them what you want, waiting to take your order and then being willing to serve you. The waiter is supposed to do the waiting, not the customer.

Imagine you are in a restaurant and your waiter comes to your table but then seems to be distracted and not listening to you. You try to give your order, but the waiter doesn't respond to you. The waiter isn't really waiting on you, and isn't really willing to serve you. Nothing you do seems to change the waiter's behaviour so you have no choice but to get up and leave the restaurant.

Now imagine that you aren't the customer at this table in the restaurant waiting to be served, but that Jesus is, and you are the waiter. Jesus is ready to give you his order, ready to give you the opportunity to serve him. Are you like the waiter I just described, or are you waiting expectantly and in anticipation for his order? Are you waiting on Jesus and willing to serve him according to his wishes and to his will?

There are many times in our life when God reveals himself to us, and he wants to find that in these times we are waiting expectantly and in anticipation for him to speak to us and for us to be willing to serve him and let him act in and through us.

## SLIDE 6

For example:

- ▶ When we come to church are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation of being able to worship and praise and honour and love God because of who he is and what he has done?
- ▶ When we read the Bible are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation to hear God's voice and for him to speak to us and reveal himself to us through it?
- ▶ When we pray are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation, submitting to God's will and his ways and his promises and his answers?
- ▶ Are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation for the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, to prompt us and guide us in all truth; and to convict us of our sin and draw us into confession and repentance and holiness?

- ▶ Are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation for the opportunities God gives us to share the gospel and our faith with others who don't know Jesus?
- ▶ Are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation to be kind to people and to be generous with our money, time and energy?
- ▶ Are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation to learn the way God has gifted us for service in his church, in his kingdom, on his mission?
- ▶ Are we waiting expectantly and in anticipation even when God appears to be silent and seems to be distant? Are we waiting and willing to trust him and believe that he is has not moved anywhere and that he is seeking to draw us back into his presence and to be in a loving relationship with him?

I'd like to finish with a prayer which I have adapted from a Christmas poem written by Renee Swope called "The Manger of my Heart". Let's pray:

Lord God, Heavenly Father,

Restore to me the wonder, — that came with Jesus' birth,  
 When He left the riches of Heaven and was wrapped in rags from earth.  
 Immanuel, — God with us, — Your presence came that night.  
 And angels announced, "Into the darkness, God brings His Light."  
 "Do not be afraid," they said, to shepherds in the field.  
 Likewise Lord, speak to me today, — help me to yield ...  
 Make me like those shepherds, obedient to Your call.  
 Setting distractions and worries aside, and to You surrender all.  
 Surround me with Your presence, Lord, I long to hear Your voice.  
 Clear my mind of countless concerns, and all the busy noise.  
 Slow me down this day — let me not be in a rush.  
 In the midst of my busy life, I want to feel your hush.  
 Jesus, come this moment — to the manger of my heart.  
 Invade my soul with your love, bring peace to every part.  
 Dwell within and around me, as I unwrap Your presence each day.  
 Keep me **waiting** for You, Lord Jesus. In Your wonderful Name I pray.

Amen.