

Anna

1 2 15

Almighty and ever-living God,
clothed in majesty,
whose beloved Son
was this day presented in the Temple,
in substance of our flesh:
grant that we may be presented to you,
with pure and clean hearts
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our text may be found in today's gospel from Luke chapter 2 and verse 37:

'a widow to the age of 84'

According to Patricia Brunt, who is herself a mere 92, and whose comments were published in our January magazine, Dinard is the place in France where the population is the most long-lived, so Anna, a prophetess, the woman who is the centre of our sermon today, and who is herself only 84, she would not have been that exceptional here at least. But she was exceptional as one of the two witnesses who saw the infant Jesus when Joseph and Mary brought their baby son to the Temple to present him to God and to make the required sacrifice according to the Torah of two pigeons or two turtle doves in thanksgiving for the birth of their first-born son.

Mary and Joseph have entered the Temple Courtyard where they are met by Simeon who has been promised by God that he would not die before he sees in the flesh God's promised Messiah. Led by the Spirit Simeon comes to the Temple where that promise is fulfilled. He sees Mary and Joseph and the child in her arms and he goes up to them, speaks to them, and taking the boy in his arms, he prophesies – the text is the famous 'Nunc Dimittis' –

'Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace . . .'

But let's turn our attention from this worthy man to a worthy woman, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, who was married for seven years, widowed and who has subsequently lived, as we know, to the great age of 84. She devoted herself totally to the worship of God, praying, fasting, never leaving the Temple, neither at night nor during the day.

Anna, a holy woman, living her life like a nun, is the second witness on this day in the Temple in Jerusalem the second to bear testimony to the fact that the baby Jesus is the promised Messiah. The words in Luke lack the resonance of the familiar words of Simeon but are no less important or significant. Let me quote the whole of verse 38: 'At that moment, she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.' The phrase Luke uses is coded language which tells us one of the promises of the coming of the Messiah would be the redemption of Jerusalem. What the outworking, the realisation of the phrase would mean in reality was, however, not exactly what the Jews were expecting at the time – not a physical but a spiritual

redemption of the heart of Judaism through the death of their Messiah on the cross and his resurrection on the third day.

But that is to come at Easter and today, on Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us look back to the crowd of witnesses who proclaimed Jesus, the baby boy, to be the Messiah: the angels, the shepherds, the wise men and now Simeon and Anna. Each, in turn, shares the truth of what they know, the truth of what they see.

So, as we move away from Christmas on towards Ash Wednesday, through Lent, to Holy Week then Easter, let us reflect whether we have found in our own eyes the truth of the statement that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that he can be our friend, our brother, our Lord and our Saviour. Let us reflect too on whether we are prepared like Anna to share such joy.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 31 : Anna

