

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple 2018

Malachi 3.1-5; Hebrews 2.14-18; Luke 2. 22-40

In the year 2000 the National Gallery in London put on an exhibition called *Seeing Salvation*. About one-third of the gallery's pictures have a Christian theme and this exhibition sought to show some of the theological truths about Christ to what is now a largely secular audience. We say, '*seeing is believing*', and maybe it was for some who visited that exhibition.

The phrase 'seeing salvation' must have been borrowed from St. Luke's gospel. The old man Simeon declared, '*for my eyes have seen your salvation*'. But what had he **seen**?

Simeon **had seen poor young parents** bringing their first-born male child to the Temple to fulfil the Jewish laws of purification. These were parents who were rooted in, and obedient to their tradition of faith who were in turn initiating their son into that tradition. They were to all intents and purposes an ordinary family

But Simeon was **seeing with eyes and heart illuminated by the Holy Spirit**. This is a different kind of seeing. Simeon was also a man who had within the tradition of the Jewish faith through his long life.

Luke tells us that he was 'righteous and devout'. He took his faith seriously by living rightly according to the Law and being devout in his worship.

Age is no barrier to the practice of our religion. With the benefit of years, Simeon had been 'keeping watch', like a sentinel on the city walls watching for the enemy advance, or the night-watchman looking for the daybreak. He had been keeping watch for the revelation of the Lord's Messiah, so when the child appeared, God's Holy Spirit in him recognised the Holy Child, God's Son. Deep spoke to deep.

Simeon rejoiced to have seen God's salvation in the unlikely form of a tiny child, being looked after by an adolescent mother. This is another sort of **seeing. The gaze of adoration**. Simeon took the child in his arms and gazed.

To gaze at something is to become completely involved with it through our eyes .. to enter that world. That is why religious art can be so powerful, we can enter into the story, find our place in it. We can gaze on the written word of scripture through meditation. Some Christians find adoration of the blessed sacrament a powerful means of connection with God in Christ. Gazing takes time and concentration.

Simeon had the gift of time that comes from having shed responsibilities of work and family. It was like a grandparent gazing adoringly at a new grand-child – some of you will know what that is like.

Simeon was also **seeing the future**. He was a prophet. He saw that this child would be the bearer of salvation. The name *Jesus* means 'God Saves'. Simeon saw that this salvation was going to be for the whole world, not just for the Jews and that this salvation was going to be achieved through suffering.

Age brings wisdom, both earthly and spiritual. Age brings courage. Simeon could have kept quiet, not wanting to bother and upset this new young mother. But he didn't keep quiet. He told the truth as he saw it, not knowing, of course, *exactly* how things would turn out.

The circumcision of Jesus at eight days old was the first shedding of his blood, that pre-figured his Passion and the shedding of his blood on the cross.

Simeon **saw hope in the child Jesus**. Through this child God would bring the light of revelation to all people. Light, representing life, love, growth and knowledge. The world would no longer be shrouded in darkness. This hope was not the effervescent fizz of optimism that looks for the quick fix, but a slow burning, steady hope that knows that it is in for the long haul.

We may think that after a certain age we can 'retire' as a Christian – take our foot off the pedal of the spiritual life – but the example of spiritual insight and courage showed by Simeon and Anna tells us otherwise.

Those of us of more mature years, can have the ability to see in ways others may not have. Some of us have been schooled in our faith tradition over many years. We have been praying and waiting and watching. The Holy Spirit is no respecter of age – God can do a new thing in us and through us at any age, if we are open to Him.

Simeon had been gifted as a prophet. He recognised God's initiative in Jesus for what it was. But he didn't have it all worked out. He brought hope, expectancy and a foretaste of reality to these young parents.

The church needs people of all generations – we are, in the new parlance, an inter-generational church and we are just as much a lively, hope-filled church if our average age is high, than if we were packed full of young families.

So let us take heart and rejoice in the example and witness of Simeon and Anna, through whom God worked with such vigour.

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