



# Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Watertown, WI

## **“What Are You Waiting For?”**

Rev. David K. Groth

*“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 there was a prophetess, Anna. . . [who] coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Jesus to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” Luke 2:22-40*

**December 30, 2012**

### **Collect of the Day**

O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who Made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and

So what are *you* waiting for? Everyone is waiting for something. What are you looking forward to more than anything else right now? Waiting to get a driver's license? To graduate? Get married? Waiting to get a better job? Shoot your age in golf? See the birth of a grandchild? Everyone is waiting for something. What are you waiting for?

Mary and Joseph are in Jerusalem at the Temple, and they are met by two very interesting elderly people, first a man named Simeon and then a woman named Anna. They are both waiting for the Messiah. The text says Simeon is waiting for the "consolation of Israel", and Anna is waiting for the "redemption of Jerusalem".

They are devout. They spend most of their time around the Temple, attending worship, praying, fasting, maybe helping out as volunteers. Every congregation has to have a few Simeons and Annas. One pastor called them "Church Mothers" and "Church Fathers", elderly women and men who are at every worship service, every activity, and serve as mothers and fathers to the entire congregation. Sometimes they have and exert enormous influence; usually, though, they are just loving and supportive. They stick with a church through thick and thin. Pastors and teachers come and go. There are retirement and farewell parties and, tragically, the occasional abrupt and angry or

disgraced departure. But the church mothers and church fathers will be there the next morning, quietly doing what they do. Their presence lends a certain strength and stability that doesn't come any other way. Every church needs a few Simeons and Annas.

Simeon, Luke says was righteous and devout and was waiting for the consolation of Israel, the comfort that the Christ would bring. The text says the Holy Spirit had revealed to him he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, the Messiah.

At this time in her national history, things were not going very well for the nation of Israel. God seemed to have become quiet. The last prophet (Malachi) lived 400 years before, and there hadn't arisen a prophet since. Israel had also lost its political independence. The once proud nation had become a backwater province of the Roman Empire, which had set up a puppet king named Herod. Herod was ruthless, and paranoid, and that combination caused much suffering in Israel. Things were not going very well for Israel, and, even worse, many were thinking the Messiah would never come, almost as if God had hibernated or something. There was an air of hopelessness in the land.

The text says Simeon is still holding out hope, like a candle in the darkness. He's still waiting for the consolation of Israel, the comfort that he just knew the Christ would bring. Remember, one of the titles given the Messiah was that of the Comforter. Simeon was longing for that comfort . . . for himself, for the entire nation.

It strikes me that the desire to be comforted is a universal human need. We all struggle with times of fear and sadness, loneliness and emptiness, even hopelessness. Every one of us has things going on where a little consolation would be welcome. If only it were as simple as pulling out a tube of "comfort balm",

but it's not that simple.

I'll pick an example that maybe we haven't talked about, one that causes more heart ache than the world estimates or is ready to console. I'm thinking of some grandparents who had such high hopes for their grandchildren . . . maybe a beautiful little girl who was so full of vitality and seemed to hold so much promise. But adolescence did not go well. She quit school too early, and struggles to hold on to a job. Confirmation marked the end of her relationship with the church and maybe with the Lord. And now she's pregnant and has moved in with a guy who is just bad news; she's hooked her trailer to a guy who is aimless and lacks ambition and probably uses drugs. Your heart aches and there's little you can do. With Simeon, you too are waiting for consolation, waiting for comfort and hope, and you know the only one who can really fix this thing is the Lord.

Verse 28 says Simeon took up the infant Jesus in his arms and began to praise God. Jesus was the consolation Simeon was waiting for. Even though that infant could not yet even crawl, Simeon knew by inspiration that he would be the one who brings comfort and hope to otherwise hopeless circumstances.

I wonder how Mary felt as this elderly man whom she did not know took her infant from her arms and started praising God in a loud voice. It had to have been a bit unsettling. But I suspect it eventually became clear to Mary that the old man was no threat to Jesus. His hands were strong yet gentle, and his words crystal clear and with tears in his eyes he said: "Lord, now let 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 the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel." The consolation for which Simeon had been waiting was in this infant Jesus.

The other one in the Temple was Anna. She's 84 years old. After her husband died she dedicated herself to prayer and service in the Temple. I picture her with a crooked back, and leathery skin mottled with bleached and brown patches, deeply latticed with wrinkles. The text indicates she's been a fixture at the Temple for most of her life. Like Simeon, she too was waiting for the Messiah, but from a different orientation. She's not focused so much on comfort. The text says she's waiting for redemption.

The word redemption is related to the idea of captivity. The one who needs to be redeemed is captive to something. I'm thinking of God's people Israel enslaved in Egypt, and the plagues and the Passover . . . the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and mantel, and how God, with an outstretched hand, brought his people out of slavery in Egypt. It ultimately points to the day when the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, with outstretched hands delivered us from slavery to sin.

Just as consolation is a universal human need, so also is redemption, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" writes Paul (Rom. 3:23) and "If we say we have no sin" or if we assume it's not a big deal, we're lying to ourselves (1 Jn.1:8). Redemption is a universal *need*; it's not a luxury. It's not something without which we can make do. Forgiveness is not just something that's nice to have for peace of mind. No, we need forgiveness like we need hydration. Without it, there's only death, spiritual, temporal, eternal death. But with forgiveness, there's life . . . spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

Somehow Anna knew that in this infant was the redemption of the world. So when *she* sees him, she too breaks out in thanksgiving to God. Here at last is the One who would save his people from their sins.

Simeon was waiting for consolation, Anna for redemption, and in Jesus, they find what they've been waiting for. How it must have startled Mary and Joseph to have such things said over their infant. Simeon and Anna are not fawning over how cute he is. They are rejoicing in what Jesus has come to do. They were waiting for consolation and forgiveness and that's a nice summary of what God's Son came to bring them and each of us: consolation and forgiveness. When we have those two things, we have everything.

“Come to me” Jesus said, “all you who are weary and burdened” . . . all you whose dreams for your children and grandchildren have been shattered by the reality of it all . . . come to me, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). “I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace” Jesus said. “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

In Jesus, we also have the forgiveness we so very much need. This infant would grow up to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In John 8 Jesus said, “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin . . . [but] if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

So . . . what are you waiting for? There are two things on everyone's list: comfort and forgiveness. And the Good News is that Christ was born to bring you both. Amen.



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