

Dear Friends,

Luke 2: 34-38

Simeon is in the temple. He is holding Jesus in his arms and telling Mary about the future he will have. He has to admit that not everything will be bright. There will be shadows and dark times. He will be "a sign that will be opposed". He will come with good news of the love of God. He will come with gifts that bring healing and freedom. Some will accept and follow him. Others will reject or challenge or even do what they can to destroy him.

Simeon sees not only the pain this will bring to Jesus but also the suffering that Mary will experience. He tells her that it will be like a sword piercing her soul. She will hear the cruel things that people say about her son; she will be aware that he is on a collision course with the powerful; ultimately, she will be at the cross, close to him, while he is being tortured and executed.

Simeon is not the only one in later life that is in the temple at just the moment when Jesus is there. Another is Anna. She is eighty-four years old. Her husband died after only seven years of marriage. She never leaves the temple but spends her days and nights worshipping, praying and fasting. Luke tells us that she is a prophet, one who has been given insights into the heart and mind of God and shares those insights with others. She encounters Jesus, praises God, and speaks about the child to everyone who is waiting for God to act.

This pattern of encounter followed by praise and speaking about Jesus is one that we have seen before. The shepherds encounter angels and then Jesus. After their encounters they talk about Jesus and make known what the angels said about him. They also praise God. The pattern will be completed at the close of Luke's gospel. It ends with the friends of Jesus "continually in the temple blessing God". This is their praise after their encounter through being his disciples. For the pattern to be truly complete as well as praising God, they would also have to be talking about Jesus to others. This is hinted at just before the book closes. Jesus commissions them when he says "you are my witnesses". But in the gospel, we do not see the witnessing taking place. Luke saves that for a second book which he devotes to the stories of the sharing of the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth. That book is The Acts of the Apostles.

The time in the temple is over. Mary and Joseph take Jesus home to Nazareth. We know little about his childhood but we are told that he grows, becomes strong, is filled with wisdom, and the favour of God is upon him.

God bless you,

Tony