

Week 4 Song of Simeon – Nunc Dimittis

The *Nunc Dimittis* can be found in Luke 2, vv 29 – 32 and forms part of the account of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (vv 21 – 40). Under the Mosaic law (Leviticus 12), a baby boy should be circumcised when eight days old. When he is forty days old, his mother's time of purification was complete and a sacrifice of a lamb (or if a lamb could not be afforded, two doves or young pigeons) was to be made in the Temple.

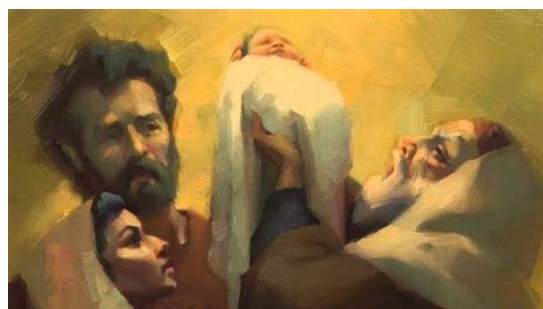
The 400-year period between the end of the Prophets and the birth of Christ could be described as days of darkness for the Jewish people. Their nation had been ruled by Persia (who had been defeated by the Greeks) and was now under Roman authority. Herod ruled with an iron rod, and with some degree of cruelty, as post-Christmas remembrance of the slaughter of the young children in Bethlehem reminds us.

Jews believed that the Messiah would restore Israel to its rightful place, a mighty nation, self-governing and influential. To some that meant a king in the line of David who would come in power, raise up a mighty army and defeat their enemies. Others believed that God alone would break into history and achieve the same end by supernatural means.

But there were some who had no dreams of mighty armies and violence to achieve God's purpose, and during this long silent period in the nation's relationship with God they had stayed quietly watchful, remained patient and prayed hard for God's purposes to be fulfilled. They never gave up hoping that God would one day return and bring salvation to his people. Simeon, and the prophetess Anna who we read about in Luke 2:36 were part of this movement, and known as the 'Quiet in the Land', Israel's faithful prayer-warriors!

Simeon's song is known as the Nunc Dimittis, from the opening words of the Vulgate translation of Luke's Gospel. Since the 4th century it has been used in such evening worship services as Compline, Vespers, and Evensong. In some Christian traditions, this meeting between Mary, Joseph, Jesus and Simeon is commemorated on February 2 as Candlemas or more formally, the Presentation of the Lord.

In the songs we are reflecting upon, there are ordinary people that Luke introduces us to who will go on to leave their mark on history, and long be remembered. Zechariah and Elizabeth's long childless years of prayer were answered in the birth of a boy who would announce the coming Messiah. Mary, in faithful obedience to God, became the mother of Jesus. Shepherds going about their daily tasks became messengers of Jesus' birth. Now Simeon and the elderly Anna, worshipping night and day, praying for the salvation of God's people.



Some questions to think about

1 – What in particular (if anything) attracts you to Simeon?

2 – Is there anything in Simeon’s song that resonates particularly with you?

3 - There was something in that little baby, just 40 days old, that Simeon recognised as God’s light shining out toward him. Have you come across people like that, and if so what made you think how close their relationship with God must be?

4 - Simeon had spent a long time praying for his nation. How easy is to get so wrapped up in our personal life and its concerns that we neglect to uphold the country we live in and its population in prayer? Should there be ‘national prayer days’ with which local churches can get involved?

5 - Simeon was patiently holding on to a promise which God had given him during his prayerful vigils, that he would see the Messiah before he died. There’s almost a sense of release with his song of joy, that now he can die in peace, his work done. Has God given us any special promise? If it is presently unfulfilled, how patient are we with God?

6 – Is there anything we can actively do to show the true Christmas light among the shopping streets, illuminations, tinsel and crowded shops of our local area?

7 - God’s Salvation came to us through one nation and spread to all nations, ‘A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel’ as Simeon reminds us. Not an easy question to answer, but is that glory still reflected in the nation of Israel and should the nation which is the centre of our Christmas celebrations be more of a focus for our prayers than it currently is?

8 - Mary was warned that Jesus would face opposition, because his message was one which would cause so many to question the way that they were living. Is the message that you hear from the pulpit one that regularly challenges you, and in what ways?

5 - How important are songs at Christmas? We’ve looked at four which are in Luke’s Gospel, but which songs or carols are important for you through Advent – maybe ones you’ve grown up with, or newer songs?

10 - What is it within the Christmas message embodied in these four songs that brings you regularly (or when you choose) to a place of worship?

