

Luke 2:21-39

Jesus: Worth the wait

I wonder if you've ever waited a long time for something significant in your life.
If you barrack for the St Kilda football team in the AFL
The last time and only time you won a premiership was all the way back in 1966
When Daryl Baldock hoisted the premiership cup after defeating Collingwood
That's 60 long years of waiting
60 long years of disappointment
But others of you know the long wait and then the taste of victory
Sydney Swans supporters had to wait 72 years until they won in 2005
Western Bulldogs supporters had to wait 62 years until they won in 2016
But that's nothing compared to supporters of Crystal Palace in the English Premier League
Since the founding of the club in 1905
They had never won any major championships for 120 years
That's two whole generations of supporters who waited and died
With nothing to show for it
Until last year when they finally won their first ever FA Cup against Manchester City
Can you imagine the supporters when they won?
Grandparents and even parents who died waiting
And then finally for their grandchildren of those first supporters the wait was over
They had finally won
Can you imagine the elation, the sheer joy that the wait had been worth it

In today's bible passage,
We meet two people who had been waiting their whole lives for something important
Something in fact their nation had been waiting 700 years for
And then finally their wait was over.

Let me pray and ask God to help us understand this passage.

I'm going to make two points in this passage

Jesus is worth the wait

And Jesus is worth the witness

Before we do anything else, let me set the context of this bible passage.

In the first few verses of the passage

We see an ordinary Jewish family doing ordinary Jewish things.

Things required by God

And Luke goes to some lengths to show us that this young couple Mary and Joseph

Were righteous and law abiding after the birth of their son Jesus

Verse 21

²¹ When the eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus—the name given by the angel before he was conceived. ²² And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were finished, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

Joseph and Mary were required by the Old Testament Law to do three things.

Have their baby son circumcised at 8 days old according to Genesis 17

Every woman who gave birth also had to undergo a purification ceremony according to Leviticus 12.

Mary has completed this.

And the final requirement of the law after the first two things were complete

Was for parents to consecrate their firstborn male to God according to Exodus 13.

And that is why Joseph and Mary have taken Jesus to the temple to present Him to God

And we're told in verse 24 that as part of the completion of their duties

They presented two turtledoves for sacrifice.

Which suggests that Joseph and Mary were a poor family

According to Leviticus 12 if they could not afford a lamb for sacrifice

They could provide two birds instead

And so Luke paints this picture of a poor, but righteous family

Devoted to doing what God requires of them

In many ways an ordinary Jewish family

And unlikely to draw the attention of most people at the temple

And yet there is something extraordinary about this baby

We're told in verse 21

Jesus was named not by his parents

But by the angel Gabriel in chapter 1 when Mary was told of her miraculous pregnancy

And earlier in chapter 2 when Jesus was born

Another angel announces his birth

To a group of shepherds in the Bethlehem countryside

Verse 10

I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a Saviour was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This child is God's Saviour sent into the world

That is what the name Jesus means

Literally, "God saves" as Matthew chapter 1 tells us

Because he will save his people from their sins

Jesus also has another title – Messiah or Christ

God's appointed King, the deliverer of His people

None other than the Lord God himself.

And so Jesus is this extraordinary main character

Born into this very ordinary side character family

He is, as it were – an undercover Messiah

And by the time he is presented at the temple

Just weeks old

The question is, will anyone recognize the undercover Messiah?

Here's our first point

Jesus is worth the wait

Enter Simeon and Anna into the picture

Two elderly people who find themselves at the right time and the right place

And *both of them* recognize the undercover Messiah

In fact, *both of them* had been waiting for Jesus their whole lives

There's no indication that they are a couple

Or that they even knew each other before this

But they are both very similar

The first thing to note is that both are righteous in God's eyes

Both of them filled with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 25

²⁵ There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him.

Three times in fact in this passage, the Holy Spirit is associated with Simeon.

God's favour is upon him.

But not just on Simeon but also on Anna

Who is described as a prophetess in verse 36

One who spoke on behalf of God

And there are only a few prophetesses in the bible

Including Deborah the Judge and Miriam, the sister of Moses

So we have here in Anna, who is filled with God's Spirit

And receives revelation from God

And one who is devoted to worshipping God

In verse 37, we're told she did not leave the temple

Fasting and praying to God day and night

Both Anna and Simeon are well advanced in years

In Simeon's case we are not told exactly how old he is

But twice the passage implies his death in the near future in verses 26 and 29

In fact seeing the Messiah is like the one bucket list item that Simeon had left

And having not only seen Jesus

But held the Messiah in his hands,

Simeon is ready to depart this life in peace.

In Anna's case we're told in some translations

That she was 84 years old when she met Jesus

And in others that she was a widow for 84 years which would make her more than a 100

When she met Jesus

The average age of a social media influencer is probably 15-35 years old

It's interesting isn't it who we choose to listen to and follow

I think Luke includes Anna and Simeon in his gospel

Because he is saying, you need influencers like these two

People who have lived and experienced everything life throws at you

People who have known joy and suffered griefs,

People who know what is trivial and what is important

People who have studied the Bible and taken its truth deep into their hearts

People who are prayerful and dependent on God

People who truly know what it means to wait on God patiently

Trusting God for years, maybe even decades

When people like that speak, you should listen to their wisdom

And I can tell you now there are people like that in our church

I know because I have been blessed by them

The wisdom you gain by the time you are aged 65-95

Is obviously much more than that when you are 35

And in a culture that looks down on the elderly, you should take note.

Choose your influencers carefully.

Both Anna and Simeon have been waiting all their lives
In the hope that God would act on behalf of their people
In verse 25, Simeon is looking forward to Israel's consolation we are told
And in verse 38, Anna is looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem
And at the time, Israel was under Roman occupation
The Jews did not have their own freedom
And so you could easily think that this is what Anna and Simeon were waiting for
That they were waiting for the Messiah to deliver his people from the Romans
To win their freedom

But Anna and Simeon were longing forward to much more than this
Simeon being a devout worshipper of God
Had studied the scriptures
And he knew the prophecies of Isaiah
And the servant songs contained in these prophecies
And he takes one of those servant songs
Written 700 years before Jesus
And then he sees in Jesus the fulfillment of this prophecy
That's Isaiah 49, that we heard read
As quoted by Simeon in Luke chapter 2 verse 30

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation. ³¹ You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.

The prophecy of Isaiah 49
Speaks of a servant of God who would rescue the nations
And can you imagine yourself in Simeon's shoes?
"We have been waiting for 700 years for this"
"We have been waiting for God's salvation"
"And God's salvation is this person"
"This baby that I hold in my hands"
"This baby is God's messiah"
"The glorious Saviour not only for our people"
"But the Saviour for all the nations of the world"

Can you imagine Simeon's tears of joy?
This is a thousand times greater than the joy of the Crystal Palace supporter
The long wait is over
I've met the Saviour who will make everything right
And I am ready to die now.

And as the gospel of Luke unfolds
We see that the way that Jesus will save us is through his death on the cross
And what Jesus will save us from
Is from eternal death for our sin against God
And on the cross the Saviour exchanges his life for that of sinners like us
Jesus dies our death and we receive his life
The redemption that Anna speaks of
Will be a redemption from slavery to sin and death

Jesus will buy our freedom not from the Romans
But from bondage to sin and death
Later on, followers of Jesus as they reflected on the cross
Would see in the death of Jesus
The fulfillment of another servant song of Isaiah
Isaiah 53

⁵ But he was pierced because of our rebellion,
crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him,
and we are healed by his wounds. ⁶ We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our
own way; and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all.

The words iniquities, transgressions and rebellion are all different ways to talk about our sin
And the way Jesus saves and brings lasting peace and healing
Is to be crushed for our sin
His wounds are what bring us healing with God
I wonder if God had revealed all of this to Simeon
We're not sure exactly how much Simeon knew ahead of time about Jesus
But what is clear is to Simeon is this.
Jesus is worth the wait.
The Messiah is here and Simeon moves from promise to praise

We're all waiting for something aren't we?
What is it that you're waiting for?
What is it that has taken hold of your longings?
What is that one bucket list item that once you achieve it
You could genuinely say, I'm ready to go
Dismiss your servant in peace.

Do you long for the financial security of owning your own house?
Are you waiting for that relationship that will finally give you the love that you seek?
Is it that course that you've been trying to get into for so long?
Or that job that will give you the success you crave
Maybe it's that permanent visa?
Or children or grandchildren?
What is it that you're waiting for?
And once you get it, are you convinced it will be worth it?

Tom Brady is the greatest quarterback in NFL history
And one of the greatest athletes in any sport
He's won 7 super bowls – that's one more than any club in the history of the sport
In an interview with 60 minutes he said to the reporter Steve Kroft:

A lot of times I think I get very frustrated and introverted, and there's times where I'm not the person that I want to be. Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what is." I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think: God, it's gotta be more than this. I mean this can't be what it's all cracked up to be. I mean I've done it. I'm 27. And what else is there for me? I wish I knew. I wish I knew.

I wonder after all he's achieved
If Tom Brady has found that all these super bowls are worth it

Have they delivered everything that he's been waiting for?

I suspect not

Ray and Harold were members of our church until they died
I recorded my first interview with them during COVID lockdown
And then the year after I recorded my second interview when Ray turned 90
Ray died the next year in 2022 and then Harold the year after that
And it was my honour to conduct both their funerals
Ray and Harold were my Anna and Simeon
People who lived with such wisdom, peace and hope
That you wanted to learn everything you could from them
Every time I went to visit them,
I received much more than I ever gave to them
Because everything in their life was about Jesus
Whether it was 66 years of marriage
Or surviving cancer
Or decades spent serving others
Or raising children, grandchildren or great grandchildren
All of their life was anchored in their trust in Jesus
And in death what they longed for was to see their Saviour Jesus face to face
And if you asked them is Jesus worth the wait
In a heartbeat they would have said "Of course he is"
Jesus is worth it.

This brings us to our second point

Jesus is worth the witness

As much as Jesus is the Saviour of the world

He is a Saviour who brings a sharp edge

This child will divide people

Verse 33

³³ His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary, "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed — ³⁵ and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

There is a cost to following Jesus

Some will love him and others will hate him

The Saviour brings a sword

That cuts to the heart of people

And exposes what people are really thinking

Jesus did this during his ministry on a number of occasions

But he will also do this to his own mother – Mary

Mary went on a quite a journey in relation to Jesus

When Jesus began his public ministry and started attracting large crowds of people

We're told in Mark chapter 3

That his family, Mary included, thought he was out of his mind

And they came looking for him to restrain him from what they thought would cause harm to the reputation of his family

Think of how hurt Mary must have felt when Jesus said

"Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Would Mary choose her notion of family above all else
Or would she choose to obey Jesus?
And Mary witnessed Jesus' execution on the cross in John 19
As the dying Messiah provided a replacement son for her to care for her in her old age
And I wonder if she remembered this prophecy of Simeon's
That a sword would pierce her own soul
How devastating it would be to witness the torture and execution of your firstborn child
But could her heart see the bigger picture?
That this was God's plan
This was how God could rescue the nations
That through the death and resurrection of her son Jesus
God would redeem sinners
Eventually we're told in Acts 1 that Mary joined the apostles after Jesus' ascension
And it was at this point
She had come full circle to the Mary of Luke 1
Mary's allegiance had been tested
Did she worship her idea of family
Or did she worship Jesus as Lord
And Mary passed the test
And so did Jesus' half brothers - James and Jude.
The very brothers who once thought he was crazy.

Following Jesus comes at a cost
Jesus the Saviour brings a sword to many families
For not everyone agrees that Jesus is Saviour and Lord
He divides marriages and families and friendships

There are times when I think hard
About whether or not to share the message of Jesus with people
Because I know it will bring conflict between a child and her parents
Between a husband and a wife.
But should I share or not?
Is Jesus worth the witness?

I love that the account we've studied finished with Anna the prophetess
Anna knows suffering
She was only married for 7 years
She knew grief and loneliness
But she chose to devote herself to God
Her allegiance was undivided
Not that she would have sinned if she ever remarried
But the love of her life was God.
And God gave her the opportunity to meet Jesus

A number of years ago I was leading a bible study
And there was this older lady in our group
And she very much loved Jesus
Loved listening to the Bible everyday
And she shared how her marriage was hard
She had come to know Christ after she married
And her husband was not an easy man to be married to

He often criticised her and was unkind to her
She nursed him for years until he died of cancer
She prayed for him and shared Christ with him
And just before he died he turned to Jesus
But for this lady, her marriage was costly sacrifice and service
And so I asked her, what did Jesus mean to you in your marriage
And I had barely finished the question
When she answered without a second thought
“Jesus is the love of my life”

This lady knew what Anna knew
Jesus is worth the wait
Jesus is worth the witness
Even at great cost
Even when others resent your love of Christ
Where else have we to go, when Christ alone has the words of eternal life

³⁸ At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

For Anna, promise turned to praise
And then praise to proclamation
She thanked God and she began to speak about Jesus to all at the temple courts
Because when you meet Jesus
And when you know Jesus is worth it
You want to share him with others
Regardless of the cost
If you are passionate about something
You will share that with others
If you know what something means to you
You will proclaim your passion
And so if you know Jesus is worth the wait as Anna did
You will know that Jesus is worth the witness
And so I’m not going to lay the guilt on you to share Jesus with others
I’m just going to ask you if you know the worth of Jesus to you
And what he could mean to others

Kirsty, the wife of our senior pastor Clinton
Is passionate about God’s creation
Kirsty is a science teacher, and she sees the beauty of God’s hand in creation
Amongst other things, Kirsty is passionate about auroras
Which she saw for the first time I believe in 2024 after years of trying to see it
I on the other hand had never made any effort to see the aurora
Until a few weeks ago
Our family was on holiday in the south of Tasmania
One of the best places in the southern hemisphere
To see the Aurora Australis
Kirsty told my daughter Molly that the week we were in Tasmania
Was going to be one of best times to see the Aurora
As I found out later in my own research for 11 years
Solar activity like this which causes the aurora to be more intense

Would not happen on the sun for another 11 years
And there was only one clear night in Tassie that week
Molly was keeping an eye on the aurorawatch website
And so while people in Melbourne were driving all across the state to see the aurora
We stepped outside a few metres and looked into the sky
From the backyard of our AirBNB
And I took this picture from my iPhone
And then I took this picture
And then I took this picture
I thought of those words from Psalm 8
O Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth
When I consider the heavens the works of your fingers
What is mankind that you are mindful of them
I witnessed something that might be once in my lifetime
I will have to wait another 11 years to see it as intensely as we did that night
And there's no guarantee that I will be in a place as good as where I saw it
Or that the sky would be as clear as it was
The conditions were perfect to see this wonderful thing God made
And you see the irony is
If Kirsty had not told Molly
We would have been inside the house watching the tennis
And we would have missed the display that God was putting on just outside
I saw my first aurora at age 51
Thank you Kirsty and it was worth it
And I'm sold – I will tell others about it

How much more then, should I share Jesus with others.
Jesus is worth much more than an aurora
The one who made the aurora is worth it
The one who died on the cross for me is worth it
He is worth giving up everything for
He is worth the cost
He is worth your life
He is worth the wait
And he is worth your witness