

Sunday Message

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

THE WORD

Year C • 2 February 2025 • Psalter Week 4

WISE OLD HEADS

LUKE 2:22-40



In the summer of 2019, a then 93-year-old appeared on the main stage at Glastonbury, the biggest music event of the year in Britain.

It was the festival's last day, and his appearance was unexpected. To make it onto Glastonbury's main stage is a singular achievement. Many artists spend years hoping to headline there.

Most never make it. So the fact that a 93-year-old made it was all the more surprising, especially as he wasn't even in the music industry. The 93-year-old was Sir David Attenborough.



A huge roar greeted the environmentalist and television presenter as he emerged on stage. He was there to urge people to protect our planet. And he wanted to thank the organisers for making the festival plastic-free. His speech drew rapturous applause from the young audience.

David Attenborough was teaching another valuable lesson, because we live in a world that worships youth and beauty, and tends to tune out the reality of old age. Our culture tells us that to be a success, to be worth it, you must be young, attractive. Look at celebrity magazines or the world of modelling, look at reality TV. Girls feel the pressure especially, but boys feel it also.

A study published in the UK some time ago showed a worrying rise in the number of teenagers admitted to hospital to be treated for an eating disorder. And it blames celebrity

culture and social media for contributing to this rise.

"With the rise of social media and the celebrity culture, people are being bombarded by these images of what seems to be the ideal body," an expert said.

In this youth and beauty obsessed world, more and more people are using plastic surgery, botox and all sorts of fads and diets to try to look young.

In today's Gospel, we meet two old people who are not into beauty regimes or diets. Simeon and Anna are deeply religious people who have spent years in the Temple, devoting their lives to God.

Along comes a young couple, Mary and Joseph, with their new-born baby. They have brought Jesus to the Temple to consecrate him to God, as the law requires.

The Temple is full of people, including priests and scribes. These are the educated ones, the ones who know their theology and scripture, but they don't recognise who this child is. Instead, it's these two uneducated seniors, Simeon and Anna, who have the wisdom to recognise the Lord.

The others in the Temple probably had dismissed them as a pair of pious old fogeys, two geriatrics who keep getting in the way, but Simeon and Anna are the tuned-in, clued-in, awake ones, able to decipher what is happening. This unlikely duo are the agents God uses. ■

REFLECT

Today's Gospel offers valuable lessons about ourselves and about old age.

First, to appreciate who we are, the way we are. Our culture is so obsessed with looks and image that it overlooks what's really important, which is what's inside – the kind of people we are and the values we hold. We can't measure these by looking in the mirror or at pictures on Instagram, but these are what matter most of all. It's not how I look, but who I am; not whether I can model for a top ad agency but whether I am a model person; not whether I'm a size 8 or can pump more iron than anyone else in the gym, but how big my heart is.

The first lesson is to appreciate who we are, the way we are, with all our physical imperfections. None of us is perfect. We grow older and we grow old. It's part of the beauty of life. What matters is being our best selves, making the best use of the gifts God has given us.

The second lesson is to not obsess about the past. Anna and Simeon are unusual: you would expect these old people to dwell on the past, on what happened in their young days, their memories and losses. Instead, their focus is on what is to come. Something yet to happen dominates their life, and they are alive with hope and expectation, hungering for God's presence, longing for the day when they will see for themselves the glory of God. In our 21st century world, dominated by so much despair and fear, we need something of that hope and expectation which filled Simeon and Anna.

The third lesson is to appreciate older people – for they have so much to teach us. Their long years in the Temple helped Anna and Simeon to tune into God. It's the wisdom and insight of old age. It's what older people have in abundance. It's what we can too easily ignore.

Think of what your older family members give you, and treasure it. Value them while you can, and learn from them, as Mary and Joseph learned from Anna and Simeon.

As David Attenborough reminds us, we can learn so much from the older generation, irrespective of whether or not they make it onto the main stage at Glastonbury. ■

DO

Visit an elderly family member or relative this week. Take time to listen to them. Value their wisdom and insight.

PRAY

Pray that, like Simeon and Anna, you will recognise Christ as your Lord and proclaim him with joy.

SAY

"Lord, help me to see and appreciate the beauty in everyone, irrespective of age or circumstance. Amen."

LEARN

Founded in 1997, this is the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. Pope John Paul attached it to Candlemas Day because consecrated men and women are to be a light in the world, imitating Jesus, the Light of the World.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*Your merciful love, O God,
we have received in the midst of your temple.
Your praise, O God, like your name,
reaches the ends of the earth;
your right hand is filled with saving justice.*

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
we humbly implore your majesty
that, just as your Only Begotten Son
was presented on this day in the Temple
in the substance of our flesh,
so, by your grace,
we may be presented to you with minds made pure.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

FIRST READING Malachi 3:1-4

A reading from the Prophet Malachi.

Thus says the LORD God: Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his Temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 24(23):7. 8. 9. 10. R. 10bc

R: The LORD of hosts, he is the king of glory!

1. O gates, lift high your heads;
grow higher, ancient doors.
Let him enter, the king of glory! *R.*
2. Who is this king of glory?
The LORD, the mighty, the valiant;
the LORD, the valiant in war. *R.*
3. O gates, lift high your heads;
grow higher, ancient doors.
Let him enter, the king of glory! *R.*
4. Who is this king of glory?
He, the LORD of hosts,
he is the king of glory. *R.*

SECOND READING Hebrews 2:14-18

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

Since the children share in flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL Luke 2:32

R: Alleluia, alleluia.

A light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.

R: Alleluia.

GOSPEL Luke 2:22-40

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

(for shorter form read between > <)

> When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.'

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 the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the Temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

'Lord, now you are letting 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 revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.' <

And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed – and a sword will pierce through your own soul also – so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the Temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the offering made with exultation by your Church be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray,
for you willed that your Only Begotten Son
be offered to you for the life of the world
as the Lamb without blemish.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

*My eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

By these holy gifts which we have received, O Lord,
bring your grace to perfection within us,
and, as you fulfilled Simeon's expectation
that he would not see death
until he had been privileged to welcome the Christ,
so may we, going forth to meet the Lord,
obtain the gift of eternal life.
Through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*