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Waiting for the Consolation

Luke 2 v 22-38

Introduction

Well, Christmas is over! The turkey has been eaten, the presents have been opened, the king's speech has been watched, or ignored. And now we're in that in-between time, aren't we? Christmas is over and the New Year hasn't begun yet. It's like we're waiting for something to get going, but meanwhile we're just waiting.

Not everyone has opened their presents though. Some people are counting through the twelve days of Christmas. Did you spot the reference to one of the gifts from the twelve days of Christmas in our passage? That's right, two turtle doves were presented by Mary and Joseph when they took Jesus to the temple.

The day after the twelve days of Christmas is called the Epiphany. It's when some people remember the wise men visiting Jesus, and think about how Jesus reveals himself to us. In Ireland it's a day when the women have a rest and the men do all the housework, but that's not really relevant.

We're going to think about three people that waited for Jesus. And how they met him.

Simeon

About 40 days after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple at Jerusalem. It wasn't far away, just around 6 miles. When they got there they presented the baby before the Lord, and brought an offering of two turtle doves.

A man called Simeon was waiting. Let's read about him:

> *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,*
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> *[Luke 2 v 25-27]*

We don't know how old Simeon was, but maybe he was pretty old, as he had been given this promise from God, that he would see the promised Messiah, the Christ, before he died. Here was a man who knew God's voice, and followed what God said. The people knew him as righteous and devout - someone who obeyed God. And yet he knew that he needed a saviour, and because of the promise he had, he knew he would see that saviour. He didn't wait in the temple but went about his daily business, until one day the Spirit spoke to him again and guided him to the temple at the same time as Mary and Joseph brought the very child he was waiting for.

What did he do when he met the saviour?

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."

[Luke 2 v 27-32]

Now this man knew his Bible. Most of the Israelites thought about the coming Messiah as a saviour for Israel. Many of them thought he would defeat the Romans. But this man knew that the prophet Isaiah had said that the Messiah would be a saviour to all the world. Not just the Jews.

And so he rejoiced. But he had a warning for Mary. It wasn't going to be an easy life for this child, nor for his mother:

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."

[Luke 2 v 33-35]

You see we can all love a baby. But when that baby grows up and learns and speaks and does things, some will agree and some will disagree. Especially for Jesus - how people responded to him would reveal what was in their hearts. And many people wouldn't like that. And it was going to be hard for Mary - she was going to see him die on the cross.

I wonder if you've met with Jesus. Not the baby in the manger, but the Son of God, who looks into hearts and tells you that you are a sinner. That can be hard to take. We might want to deny it. But it's truth. And the good news is that he did something about that sin. He went to the cross so that it could be forgiven, so that he could be our saviour.

Anna

There was another person in the temple when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus. Her name was Anna, and she was waiting too. We know that she was an old person:

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, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

[Luke 2 v 26-37]

She did wait in the temple, but she wasn't idle. For many years Anna had been in the temple, worshipping God, fasting and praying. Notice that Luke calls her a prophetess, but it doesn't sound like she spends all her time telling people what to do - rather she is spending time

letting God talk to her. And because she had spent all that time with God, she recognised God's promised saviour when he was brought into the temple. How did she react when she met with Jesus?

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.

[Luke 2 v 38]

She went and told everyone she could. Imagine waiting for something all your life, and then it happens. Waiting for Christmas morning was hard for some of you, and that was just a few days. And maybe if you have a brother or sister and they were still sleeping, you wanted to wake them up, so they would know that Christmas had come too.

That's how Anna felt. She wanted everyone to know that the great day had come that had been promised by God. When you meet Jesus, and he becomes your saviour, don't you want all your loved ones to know about him too?

Israel

The third person isn't really a person, but a people. You see the Israelites had been waiting for over 400 years for God's promise to come to pass. God wanted them to be properly ready, so he sent someone first, to prepare the way for Jesus. His name was John, and he went about telling people that the promised one was coming soon. How did he want them to act as they waited?

Well, first he told them to repent, to turn around from their sins. Many people did, and came to John to be baptised in the river, to show everyone that they wanted to change. John said they should behave as godly people, to show others the change that had happened in them. He told them to share, to be honest, not to cheat, and not to grumble.

And then came the one who John had been preparing them for. All the waiting was over as Jesus came. What did John do when he met Jesus? He did what Jesus asked him to do - he baptised him. And when Jesus stood up again, everyone around them witnessed an amazing thing:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

[Luke 3 v 21-22]

Here was God the Father, speaking, God the Spirit witnessing and God the Son being revealed to all the people. Many of them followed him from this time on.

Conclusion

Where are you?

Are you waiting for Jesus to be revealed to you? Maybe today he is showing himself as the promised Messiah, the only one who can be your saviour.

Have you had Jesus revealed to you? Did you realise that you were a sinner and he was your saviour? What are you doing now?

- waiting for him to return
- Walking with him day by day
- Living a life that reveals him to others

It's the week between Christmas and New Year's Year. Some people make New Year resolutions, things they will try to do in the coming year. Don't wait! If God is showing Jesus to you today, come to him today, don't put it off.

And if Jesus is your saviour, show it in your words, your actions, your kindnesses, your attitudes. Let others know that Jesus is real.