



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

15th December, 2023

...she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all...

Luke 2:38

Forgive an opening quip, but did you ever consider the fact that Christmas is all about old people? There's only one baby (perhaps Mary was a teenager) but 'traditionally' most others are 'of an age'! Maybe a lesson to draw from that is: you're never too old for God to bring something new, wonderful, and even shocking into your life!

Perhaps the oldest in the story was Anna (Luke 2:36-38). Depending on the translation she was either 84 or over 100! Let's settle for the former. Either way, she was regarded as a prophet, and was a familiar figure around the temple in Jerusalem, where she *"worshipped day and night, fasting and praying"* (another lesson for me as a pensioner!). No doubt she and Simeon knew each other well and had talked about the promise revealed to him (v. 25), and their hopes and dreams for the future.

So when Simeon holds Jesus in his arms and speaks the words he must have prepared during his long awaiting, she's there. *"Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."*

We're not told anything Anna actually says. I picture her with an arm around Mary as they listen to Simeon's tough words (v.34-35) -perhaps her face and her affectionate touch saying more than Luke tells us (and Mary may well have been one of his sources, -Luke 1:2). But beyond her giving thanks to God there is something else about Anna which challenges me.

Imagine the scene; the Holy Family leave the temple courts to prepare for their onward journeys (the details of which vary in Matthew and Luke). They are watched by the tear-filled eyes and the fulfilled hearts of old Anna and Simeon, leaning on one another. Eventually Simeon says, "That's it; I can go now" (v.29). What does Anna do, presumably for the rest of her life? We are told: she *"spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."*

I've taken a lot of funerals, many for families without overt Christian belief or church involvement. I am often struck by the 'after-life-language' that people use, saying things about 'grand-dad looking down on us', or being 'reunited with loved ones' and so on; I expect you've heard similar.

As we know, the Jewish nation *"were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem"*. In many ways our own culture is *"looking forward to redemption"*... assuming a world and a life beyond the grave, but without acknowledging Jesus Christ, the Redeemer who makes that life real and possible.

I expect, like me, you feel saddened by the Christmas festivities in shops, street markets and garden centres, or TV programmes and Christmas cards, which make no mention of Jesus, and even less of the truth and meaning of His birth: the Incarnation. Anna *"spoke about the child to all..."*. Let's pray for opportunities -and the words- to speak about the infant Jesus as central to the celebration, and as hugely more significant than our culture's 'Christmas' celebrations acknowledge.