

Thought for the Day

Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

Wednesday 30th December

Luke 2.36-40

This passage is a sneaky peek ahead at the Candlemas story as the occasion was when the young child Jesus was taken to the temple to be presented to the Lord and redeemed, as firstborn son, with a sacrifice. He was recognised by the elderly priest Simeon as the Lord's Messiah, and Simeon's words which we call the 'Nunc Dimittis' are familiar. Anna's role is less well known so it's nice to focus on her today. Luke likes to give us a bit of balance on the gender front, so he has Simeon and Anna in the temple that day; in his parable collection he juxtaposes the lost sheep with the lost coin, to give a male and female version, and so on. Clearly, Luke was ahead of his time!

Not only was he at pains to include women in the narrative around Jesus but a range of ages as well. I remember acting out this story in family services by asking the oldest man and women present to be Simeon and Anna; generally speaking they were considerably older than Anna at 84 and regarded this as a great joke, taking years off them! A perfect opportunity to make the point that old age is valued here; the maturity and insight that can come with extended life experience and especially in a long life of prayer, enabled these two to perceive the work of God in the apparently ordinary family coming to the temple to perform a simple ritual along with no doubt very many others doing the same.

Age doesn't necessarily bring wisdom but it can do – depending I suppose on how we use our time. In our society the wisdom of elders is no longer respected and that's a reflection on the pace of change in a technological age. But knowing how to use a computer or the latest kind of social media is not the only measure of wisdom, and perhaps not the best one. A deep faith in God, tested over many varied experiences; a deep understanding of human nature and of relationships; a sense of what really matters in life when so much falls away with age and increasing fragility; these are gifts which are not acquired in a hurry and which cannot be rushed. They take time to develop. They are often hard won, via some of the knocks of life, and those who possess these gifts can usually tell a rich story, a rich tapestry of experiences – should anyone be interested enough to ask. That wisdom we should respect and seek to learn from.

When Anna's joy at the coming of the Messiah spilled over into praising God and telling all who would listen about the child – I wonder how many people did listen to her, listen and take notice? Or were they dismissive of an old woman's fancies? I wonder whether I would have listened and believed her?

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress. Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may rejoice in your comfort, knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

