

“*A Light of Revelation*” (Luke 2:25-40 )

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In reading today’s Gospel text we see a picture unfold as though we were witnesses to an event as it was taking place. Anna, a temple prophetess was eavesdropping. Joseph and Mary were seeking to fulfill the expectations of them as new parents according to the Law of Moses, so that is why they took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. There they met Simeon who was an elderly man and it is recorded that he, *was looking forward to the consolation of Israel*. Anna probably knew Simeon well, so she listened attentively as she overheard him speak as he looked upon the baby Jesus:

*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word: for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. [29-32]*

She more than just overheard. Anna understood what she was hearing, if not everything, enough to change her life. Something not intended for her hearing really helped her – after all these years of being alone. She was quite old. Some scholars suggest Luke was not certain as to just how old she was, but a several versions say she was 84. Even if he is not sure about her age, Luke seems to know a lot of other things about her. When Luke goes into a lot of detail, it is for a purpose. Look at this woman whose life had been lived in the very small circle of the temple grounds. What she overhears suddenly changes her life and liberates her from the confinements of her tight circle of isolation and loneliness.

We need to take a moment to appreciate Anna’s lot in life. She was a temple employee, working full time as a prophetess. It may have been her only legacy from a brief marriage to a prophet. She didn’t have much of a family background herself. Born of the tribe of Asher, least respected among the other tribes of ancient Israel, the sort of place about which jokes were probably made. One New Testament scholar when writing about this gave an example: *How many dates does an Asherite have before getting married? As many as she can pick up under the tree*. It couldn’t have been easy for a woman, widowed, childless and from Asher in a sophisticate city like Jerusalem.

She was considered useless: no one would marry her or give her children. She was left to the sole protection of God and literally within the bounds of His courts – the temple. To her, perhaps the temple was a sanctuary in more than one sense. *She did not depart from the temple* (living on the premises) *worshipping with fasting and praying by night and day*. She worked with a temple order whose special concern was *the redemption of Jerusalem*. She and the others with her all wanted the foreigners out. Jewish self-government restored and the integrity of the temple renewed.

Anna, a childless Asherite widow sought to redeem her lot by intense, rigid and narrow devotion to her religious duties and nationalistic hopes. We might see her in much the way we might see a modern day convent or cloister. Anna was eavesdropping.

Her life was touched, hope quickened in the moment of overhearing the priest counseling a family during her otherwise routine day.

How did Anna know the truth in Simeon's conviction that in this child Jesus, the way to salvation was bursting forth? Was there something in her experience to confirm the truth of what she heard? Is experience the best teacher, our best clue to the truth? We may count years and years of experience as what is really just the same experience over and over. What experience is enough to extract the precious ore of truth from the debris of gossip that is being overheard? Where is the truth between Anna and Simeon? In Simeon's words? In Anna's experience? How is an eavesdropper to know? Anna's experience kept her hoping for a better day for her and her people. Simeon's words were that a better day had come for *all people* and that there had dawned *a light for revelation to the Gentiles*. A small, narrow hope came face-to-face with a great, broad vision. In their meeting the truth was fashioned.

Anna's eavesdropping led to a religious experience and she *gave thanks to God*. The truth Anna overheard in her eavesdropping is that Jesus is not simply her personal Saviour, or the Saviour of her people, but the Saviour of the whole world. Biblical truth is not only bigger than our own personal truth. It is different. It is different from any truth we have ever known before. We can't discover it by simple searching, but it often reveals itself in an unannounced moment as the Holy Spirit chooses. We have to hear it from someone. But once we know it, it becomes the test for every other claim to truth.

There has never been anyone else like Jesus. That is what Simeon saw and said. And that is what Anna found out eavesdropping, and she believed. Her story is shared with us so that we too might believe the Christmas story and believe in this which has come to pass. Amen.