

Explore the Bible: December 27

Anticipated – Luke 2:25-38

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As you pause to catch your breath after Christmas has passed, you might look back at the days preceding it and recall the anticipation, especially if you have young children or grandchildren at home. Times of waiting can be full of excitement. Often, however, waiting can produce stress or longing and when days, months, and years drag on, it can lead to despair.

My Aunt Ruby Jean was a prayer warrior extraordinaire. She maintained an extensive prayer list, including faithful intercession for the lost. Near the top of the list was a relative named Paul. He would have nothing to do with Christianity, but my aunt faithfully and confidently prayed on.

Paul ruined his life with alcohol, cigarettes, and other bad habits, ending up with a stroke that put him in a nursing home. Not long after, an old drinking buddy of his came to Christ. When he got some discipleship behind him, he began to minister to Paul in various and meaningful ways.

Soon, the buddy had Paul accompanying him to church. After

months of mentoring by this transformed friend, Paul became a believer. My dear Aunt Ruby Jean died before seeing her answered prayer come to fruition, but her confident anticipation of it happening never waned.

Anticipation. The Jewish people had long anticipated the coming of the Messiah, as foretold throughout the Old Testament. For over 400 years, no prophet had spoken for God. The Jews were chafing under Roman rule, and longed for a deliverer. Many anticipated a Savior who'd free them from this Roman oppression. The time had now come, although not in the manner expected.

It happened at the temple during a seemingly-ordinary Jewish religious observance. The ceremony had a two-fold purpose: purification for the mother, and a dedication of the firstborn to the Lord (see Exodus 13:2 and 12, and Leviticus 12).

Although the ceremony was commonplace, when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus for this observance, two faithful servants of God recognized this was no ordinary child. The first was Simeon, whom today's passage calls "righteous and devout" (Luke 2:25 ESV). Our passage says he had been "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). The MacArthur Study Bible explains this comforting word "is a Messianic title, evidently derived from verses like Is 25:9; 40:1,2; 66:1-11."

Being closely attuned to the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:25), Simeon was promised he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ (v. 26). As the Spirit led him to the temple, this aged saint realized his years of anticipation had been completed. Drawing close to Mary and Joseph, he tenderly cradled the holy infant in his arms.

As Simeon burst forth in praise to God, he declared he was at peace and ready to depart this life, as he'd seen God's promise fulfilled. The "consolation of Israel" would bring salvation to "all peoples," being both a "light for revelation

to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (vv. 30-32).

As the parents stood by, amazed, Simeon changed his tone. Addressing Mary, he warned that this child’s coming would bring division with the “fall and rising of many in Israel” (v. 35). For those rejecting Him, He would be a “stone of stumbling.” For those accepting Him, He would be the “chief cornerstone” (1 Peter 2:4-8 NKJV).

Seeing her son’s rejection and ultimately, His horrific crucifixion, would be like a sword piercing Mary’s heart, Simeon declared, but through it “the thoughts of many hearts [would] be revealed” (v 35).

When two or more witnesses testified to something, it held more weight to the Israelite people (Deut. 19:15, Matthew 18:15-16). The prophetess Anna provided the second witness. Based on your Bible translation, she was at least 84 years old and possibly over 100. Making her dwelling at the temple, her life was totally devoted to God, her days and nights spent in worshipping, fasting, and praying (v. 37).

At the same time, she joined this holy conclave and, like Simeon, gave thanks to God and testified about the Christ-child to “all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (v. 38). The fact that these two were elders and greatly respected for their faith lent substantial credence to their words.

Anticipation. Long years of waiting. Just as my Aunt Ruby Jean didn’t see her prayer answered in her lifetime, she anticipated the answer which did finally come. Simeon and Anna are biblical examples who experienced the same. Are you longing (maybe impatiently) for God to answer a long-prayed-for request? May these examples encourage your heart to wait with faithful anticipation.

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