

Simeon and Anna



There are some times when age brings advantages. We can speak our minds and draw on our lifetime of experience to give advice to the younger generations. We can sometimes give advice where it may not be actively sought. We can see more clearly the sweep of history that has led us to the time and place we are now. We have time to be quiet, to contemplate, to comprehend, to divine meaning where there is meaning to be found.

Today seemed like an ordinary day, until I reached the Temple. I have been there every morning for most of my life. My father brought me as a child; as a young woman I brought myself. As a young wife my husband came with me, and in my widowhood, I have come alone. I have been coming for 84 years now. This ritual of daily prayer has never been boring for me. There have been moments when I could have wished for a different liturgy, but mostly the familiar words wash over me and bathe my soul, the music of the cantors fills my senses and leaves me with an unutterable sense of joy. Sometimes though, just sometimes, I feel as if something is missing. The words I hear are words of longing, of hope, that God's promises to his people will be fulfilled by his Messiah. Yet generations have passed since we last had a prophet in the land, let alone the Messiah. Now we are not even a free people, we live under the authority of Rome. We fight to keep our culture, our language and our religion in the face of dictates from a faceless Emperor living across the sea. I long, oh how I long for God to fulfil his promise for my generation, in my time. How I long for the coming of the Messiah.

There are very few people who I now meet daily in the Temple who have been there as long as I have. One of those is Simeon. I have known him boy and man. I knew his wife Naomi, as he knew my husband Reuben. He comforted me when Reuben died only seven years after our marriage, and I comforted him when Naomi died only a year or so back, after a long and

happy marriage. I know that he also waits in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, and he is sure, as I am not, that this will happen in his lifetime.

This morning he arrived in a fever of anticipation saying that it had been revealed to him in a dream that the Messiah would come, to him, today. He spent the morning striding around the courts of the Temple looking deeply into the face of everyone he did not recognise, in the hope that this was the one. I saw the moment when it happened. I was watching him as he turned, and looked towards the gate. There stood a couple, him carrying a cage with two young pigeons, and her carrying a baby.

They looked like any other young couple coming to fulfil the law after the arrival of a new child. Simeon swept forwards so fast that everyone turned to look at what he was doing. He swooped down on the young woman and almost snatched the baby from her arms. She looked uncertainly at her husband, and I assume they both decided that it was part of the ritual, for neither of them made a move to get the baby back. Simeon held the baby up and looked at him carefully, then his face broke into a wonderful smile. He lifted his voice so that everyone around should hear him

“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.”

I knew then that these were the words that I have been waiting for; the hope and joy and consolation of Israel, the fulfilling of God’s promise to the people of Israel, and his promise to me also.

Simeon turned to the child’s mother, the smile fading from his face.

“I am sorry my dear, but I believe that this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

He looked closely at her face again, and then at that of her husband. “You are not surprised by what I say? You already know who this child is? I wish you the joy of him, for you will surely share his pain.”

When I reached the child, I took him from Simeon and held him in my arms. He seemed like the lightest thing I had ever held, and yet the heaviest. I kissed him gently on the top of his head, and quietly whispered in his ear

“Thank you”.

Then I held him out to his mother, who took him calmly from me, and wrapped him up safely again. I turned from them and began to move among the crowd that had gathered, telling them what I knew and what I understood about the baby I had just held and kissed. Most eyes were turned to me, and when I turned back the couple and their baby had slipped away, as if they had never been.

I don't know whether I will be here tomorrow. For the first time in my life I am uncertain about my future. I don't know whether I will see Simeon again. In the normal course of events we would have had this uncertainty of meeting for many years now. Old age and decrepitude would have separated us and kept us from the Temple many years ago, were it not for the certainty that each day held, that there would be an end to the wait. I know now that I will not see the fulfilment of the kingdom of God, the Messiah has many years to grow before he can take his place at the head of the people of Israel, but I have seen the chink in the curtain, the beginning of the tear in the fabric that separates us from God. And God willing, it is big enough for Simeon and I to step through now; and will grow and grow till all of those who confess his name can walk through to come before the throne of his grace.