

## “And Now The Old Folks Sing!”

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Luke 2:22-40 = the marginalized

**A**lbert Einstein, one of the greatest minds, if not the greatest mind of the twentieth century, was nevertheless quite forgetful in his old age. [Take comfort in that. You too could be brilliant.] It was not uncommon to see him strolling around Princeton with only one sock on, or with both socks but no shoes. He lived just a few doors up the street from Princeton Seminary.



Albert Einstein was thus the quintessential absent-minded professor. One day the University operator received a request for Dr. Einstein's address. The operator: "I'm sorry, but Dr. Einstein has made it absolutely clear we are not to give out his address to anyone!"

"But," the voice on the other end said, "I am Dr. Einstein."

**S**o, this week we meet Simeon and Anna ~ elderly, old, of advanced years, or shall we euphemistically say "chronologically challenged." Like Einstein, Simeon and Anna are forgetful, disheveled, disoriented ~ all the things which come with advanced age. Yet, despite all the cognitive problems associated with aging, like Einstein in Anna and Simeon we also perceive two elders with special gifts ~ strong gifts of discernment. They recognize God in the infant Jesus.



Led by the Spirit, upon seeing the baby Jesus, Anna and Simeon independently burst into song. Thus proving that Luke is not only the most feminist, Luke is also the most singingist of all four Gospels.



Last Sunday we heard the women sing: Mary's Magnificat ["my soul doeth magnify the LORD and my spirit doeth rejoice in God my savior"], harkening back to Mariam's song by the Red Sea, Hannah when she was overjoyed at her miraculous pregnancy and Sarah when

she laughed to hear of her own pregnancy. Yes indeed, last Sunday the women sang loud and clear.

**T**his week, an entirely different demographic ~ the “old folks” sing. What the elderly Simeon and the honored widow Anna sing is precisely



what the women sang last week: same song/different verse. The message today:

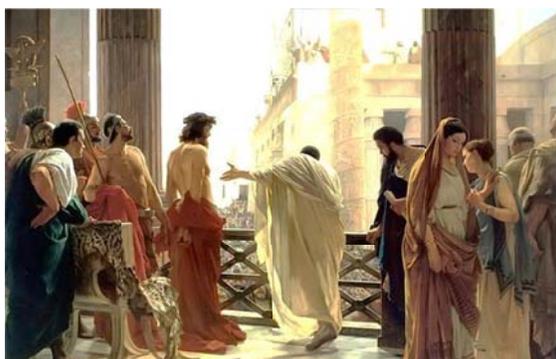
God has heard the cry of the people. Long awaited, God has sent a liberator

to “redeem Jerusalem” in the words of Anna, and to “bring salvation” in Simeon’s words, a king to free the nation and “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

This infant Jesus is to liberate the marginalized, not just within Israel, but among all nations ~ precisely the same song as Mariam, Hannah and Mary before. There are several clues that this song is yet again the Good News to the marginalized.

- Simeon and Anna add two categories to the list of marginalized: *elderly* and *widowed*.
- And Mary’s sacrifice for purification ~ two pigeons, instead of a lamb and a pigeon ~ invoked the poverty clause of Lev. 12:8. Thus, is added: *the poor*.

**T**he Gospel, the Good News of what God has done, is doing, will be doing, this Gospel was indeed greeted with rejoicing by those at the edges: shepherds, widows, elderly and the poor; later the fisherfolk, day laborers and landless peasants across Israel; still later slaves and women in the Roman empire; even in our centuries among slaves, the rejected castes and the dispossessed around the world. Across the ages, those hardest pressed are those who rejoice to embrace Jesus the Messiah.



But the opposite is also as true today as in Jesus’ day: the central powers, the rich, the famous, the powerful, Herod and his court, the Pharisees, Sadducees and priests, Pilate and the

Roman overlords, and ultimately the Roman Empire itself, they all reject the Good News completely.

Like Herod and Caesar, the powerful in all ages understand exactly what Simeon meant by Jesus coming for **“the falling and the rising of many”**. The rich know intuitively that the Good News of God’s coming in power is Bad News for them.

They understand instinctively the subversion implicit in **“the first shall be last and the last first”** ~ that order will be reversed, the high brought low ~ their power lost. It means they must change, must be transformed, and they resist this with all their heart, soul and mind, even to the point of massacring innocent children. This is not an aberration. This is the very essence of power.

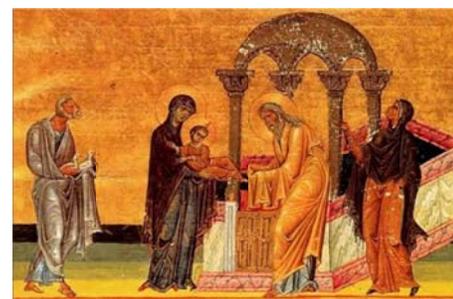
**T**oday just as in Jesus’ day: the rise of a wealthy class, those who have benefited unjustly overmuch from the inequality implicit in our economic system. They reject God’s kingdom because in truth they reject God. The ultimate arrogance, in their hubris they think they have succeeded in this world all on their own. They have no need for God.



The poor, on the other hand, are completely aware they are dependent on God for everything.

Where do we find ourselves? We like to think of ourselves among the marginalized, the poor in spirit, but are we really? Do we live our lives completely dependent on God, always seeking God, prayerfully engaging God in every decision? Or do we generally have no need of God ~ except in emergencies?

**F**rom these seemingly chance encounters in the Temple, the purpose of Jesus’ coming into our world is made clear from the songs of women and elders. That purpose is: change ~ God directed transformation not only of persons but of politics and societies.



Simeon is content now to depart in peace. He has completed the last item on his bucket list. He has seen the Messiah even through his own cataract clouded eyes. He has held him in his

arms. Simeon is like The “Old Folks” in *The Last Jedi* who can now depart in peace because a new generation has arisen.

Yet, Simeon in his prophesying heart also has regrets. He sees the overwhelming cost of the Messiah’s mission:

“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.”

There it is, the Cross there right next to the manger. Changed hearts and changed societies will cost God the only begotten. The price of transformation is astronomically high. Yet it is easy to forget that the incredibly high cost of our transformation has been borne already. New life is offered free of charge. Yes, it’s true there are no free lunches, but God’s transforming power is truly free. We but need to accept it, accept God’s offer to transform us, and yet we resist. We fear change just as much as the next person.



Yet we all do share Simeon and Anna’s longing: longing to see our lives transformed, our attitudes adjusted, our lot improved. We all want our nations redeemed, justice and peace to reign for everyone everywhere.

We want to sing like Simeon and Anna, and Mary and Hannah and Mariam. We all long for God to transform our disappointments into rejoicing, to bind up our wounds and cover our mistakes, to reveal even those ugly things we hide from ourselves, to take them all and redeem them ~ to redeem us ~ to change us, into the beautiful, wise, generous creatures God intends us to be.

The cost is already paid ~ potentially in that infant baby boy held by Simeon. The price has been paid. Accept the offer.

