

In the beginning was the Word...

An Advent & Christmas Course from the Diocese of Aberdeen & Orkney



Speak

Saturday 30th December 2023



Old Woman Reading, Probably the Prophetess Anna by Rembrandt van Rijn (1631, oil on panel) Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Scripture: Luke 2:36-40

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

To reflect.

Today's Gospel follows on from yesterday's, Mary Joseph and the infant Jesus are at the Temple. We have heard the Song of Simeon, and we now hear Anna's reaction to encountering Jesus, the Emmanuel. Anna was a prophet who spent her days in prayer, worship, and fasting. In the painting by Rembrandt above she is shown studying scriptures. Anna would have been saturated in the words of scripture and worship from her days spent at the Temple, she would have been familiar with the prophecies and everyday life of people attending, saturated in holy things and she recognised the infant Jesus.

Anna's spiritual life involved regular prayer, fasting, participation in worship and temple attendance. This was her 'rule of life', how she connected to God, her Creator and stayed alert to the work of God around her and in her midst. As we approach the end of the calendar year, we often review the end that has gone, those things that have helped us and those things we have not. This can include our spiritual lives, what are those things that have helped us on our journeys as disciples this year, that have helped to us to know God and love God more deeply and clearly? Today the invitation is to reflect on your spiritual practices and consider what might you resolve to do more of, to try or to explore in the coming calendar year as we seek to follow Anna's example?

Spiritual practices you may wish to explore, try or do more include: Prayer, scripture reading, retreats, spiritual direction, service, tithing, participation in worship services, pilgrimage and more.

Examples of Rules of Life can be found at <https://ruleoflife.com/> amongst other place, many Holy Orders have rules of life. These can be found online or the following books might be useful.

- The Rule of St. Benedict
- Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today by Joan Chittister
- At Home in the World: A Rule of Life for the Rest of Us by Margaret Guenther
- Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way by Stephen A. Macchia
- Thrive: Life-Giving Disciplines for a Chaotic World by Markene Meyer
- You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit by James K. A. Smith
- The Rule of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist by the Society of Saint John the Evangelist

To listen

When Mary went to the Temple (*Maria walt zum Heiligtum*) by Johannes Eccard, one version is by the Choir of St John's, Elora

<https://open.spotify.com/track/6hKoXg8w24Vk2Xa7BKJbgk?si=f803d8af177b44d6>

Speak O Lord by Keith and Kristyn Getty

<https://open.spotify.com/track/5S3KGLRJlrwZq0xfT3VLdV?si=5cb8699f683b49f2>

...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.