

In the beginning was the Word...

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



Word

Sunday 31st December 2023



Saget, Father George. Altar of Keur Moussa Abbey, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=56077> [retrieved December 28, 2023]. Original source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:KeurMoussaAutel.jpg>.

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"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."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "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 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 seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped 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.

The Gospel appointed for the First Sunday of Christmas is the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple where we encounter Simeon and Anna. Two older people who spent their time at the temple, watching, waiting, seeking what God was doing in the world. Here they encounter the infant Jesus and discern who they are meeting. Simeon responds with a Song (the Nunc Dimittis) whilst what Anna says we do not know she said exactly but we know she used words to praise God and to tell others what and who she had met and experienced.

In today's reading we hear about words – words of scripture that Simeon and Anna studied, words uttered by Simeon that are often used in Evening prayer services and words that Anna expressed her praise to God and to tell others the good news. What are words that help you worship and connect to God. Today you're invited to spend some time with those words – scripture, poetry, hymnody – and take some time to Praise God.

To Pray – the Collect for the First Sunday of Christmas

Almighty God, you have shed upon us the new light of your incarnate Word. May this light, enkindled in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

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