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Waiting a lifetime

The story of Anna

1



(This story is based on Luke 2:21–40.)

Anna gazed over the sea of faces of those who were waiting to present their children to the priests in the temple. It was a familiar sight. Day after day parents arrived to obey the law that God had given to Moses many years before. Rich and poor, locals and people from far away: all visited the temple forty days after the birth of their babies to thank God for their safe arrival and to ask his blessing on their lives. Over the years Anna had lost count of the number of times she had watched this ceremony, each time with a glimmer of hope in her heart that God would allow her what she longed for.

‘Hello, Anna.’ A man’s voice broke into her thoughts.

Anna turned to see her old friend Simeon standing beside her. ‘Simeon?’ she said. ‘I didn’t expect to see you here at the temple today.’

Simeon shook his head. ‘God told me to come,’ he said quietly. ‘And when God speaks, I must do what he says.’

Slowly the old man moved away. Anna followed him with her eyes. Her heart was beating faster than normal. Why had God told Simeon to come here today? Could this be it, the moment they had longed for? She would keep watch!

Anna settled down on one of the seats around the edge of the temple court. She often sat there, watching the world go by, smiling to passers-by and watching the builders continue their work. She had seen so many changes to the temple in her lifetime. When she was young, the temple on this site was an old and crumbling building, but Herod the Great had ordered that it be knocked down and a magnificent new temple be built in its place. There was still a lot of work to do but it

was already clear that, when finished, it would be a stunning building.

‘Not that a building really matters,’ Anna reminded herself quietly. ‘It is more important to worship God in your heart.’

‘Worship God in your heart’—that was what Anna had sought to do throughout her life. She was now eighty-four years old. She was an old woman, but, although her body might have grown weaker as the years went by, her love for God had grown stronger day by day. Life hadn’t worked out for Anna as she had expected. She remembered clearly her wedding day and the first seven happy years of marriage. She had had so many dreams, so many hopes for the future. All that had changed when her husband died. She was so young to be a widow, but, despite her age, she had never remarried and now she lived in the temple, where she could worship God all the time.

Anna’s thoughts were brought to a sudden halt. She saw Simeon hurrying towards the temple gate, moving more quickly than she had seen him move for years! He was heading towards a young couple who had just entered the courtyard. They were obviously very poor. They didn’t wear fine clothes like some of the people who visited the temple, and Anna had seen the man earlier handing two pigeons to a priest as an offering to God. Two birds was the smallest offering anyone was allowed to bring.

Anna’s heart beat even faster. She remembered the words Simeon had repeated to her often over the years: ‘Anna, God has told me that I will not die until I have seen the Messiah with my own eyes.’

If other people had told her that God had made them such a promise Anna might not have believed them. After all, the Jewish people had been waiting hundreds of years for God to send his Son, the Messiah, into the world. But Anna knew Simeon so well and totally trusted him to tell the truth. Day after day, year after year, they had watched and waited. They were sure that when the Messiah arrived he would be certain to go to the temple.

Anna watched as Simeon approached the couple. She could see excitement rising on his face. As she watched, the woman gently lifted her baby and laid him in Simeon's arms.

Anna jumped up; this didn't usually happen. Something unusual was definitely going on, and she wasn't going to miss out!

As she approached she could hear Simeon's voice above the murmur of the crowds: 'Lord, you have done what you said. You have let me see the Saviour sent from heaven. Now that you have kept your promise I can die in peace!'

Anna saw the young couple exchange glances. They seemed pleased by what Simeon said, but not totally surprised. It appeared that God had already been speaking to them.

Then Simeon turned to the baby's mother. He spoke gently. 'This child,' he said, 'will change many things in this world. Many will speak out against him and I am afraid that, because of him, you too will be caused much pain.'

The woman nodded. It appeared that this simply confirmed what she already knew.

Anna could not contain herself any longer. She scurried over to them and took the baby in her arms. She was filled

with wonder as she looked down into his tiny face. How could it be that this baby would change the world? How could this be God's Son lying peacefully in her arms? There were so many questions, but for now she would just enjoy the moment. She glanced up to look at Simeon. His face was glowing but there were tears in his eyes.

'God kept his promise,' he said softly.

Anna looked back down at the child and nodded. 'As he always does,' she added.

Quietly Anna began to thank God for the precious baby she was cradling. Mary and Joseph, the baby's parents, watched her. They had no idea what lay ahead for them, but they would bring Jesus up as best they could in their small, poor home.

Simeon and Anna stood together as they watched Mary, Joseph and Jesus leave the temple. They would never see them again, but they were happy. They had seen the Saviour of the world!

As soon as they were out of sight Anna hurried back into the temple court and began to talk to people about the baby she had just held. It would be thirty years before anyone else would realize that Jesus really was God's Son sent from heaven, but Anna knew from the start, and her heart was filled with joy.



Anna's name is only mentioned once in the Bible. She is not well known but she is one of the Bible's hidden heroes. She hadn't had an easy life but she didn't sit around allowing herself to be miserable; instead she spent her life

worshipping God and praying to him. Sometimes things don't go quite as we would like in our lives. Sometimes we get sick, sometimes people we love die, or other bad things happen to us. Anna shows us that God is always there when things go wrong. The story of Anna also shows us that sometimes our prayers are not answered straight away. Anna and Simeon had waited many years for God to keep his promise to send his Son. They never gave up hope but trusted God to do what he had said.

What do you think?

- 1. Why do you think Anna lived in the temple?*
- 2. Why do you think God chose to tell two old people that his Son had arrived in the world?*
- 3. Have a look at Luke 2:8-20 to find out which other people knew that the baby Jesus was God's Son.*

Bringing others

The story of Andrew

2



*(This story is based on
Mark 1:16–20; 13:3; Luke 5:1–11;
and John 1:35–42; 6:1–15; 12:20–22.)*

Hello, my name is Andrew, and you may not realize this but I was one of the very first people to follow Jesus. I well remember the first time I saw him. I had travelled from my home-town of Bethsaida to listen to the teaching of a man called John the Baptist. John was an unusual sort of person! He wore funny clothes made out of camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey—not exactly my taste in food! John spent his time travelling near the river Jordan, announcing to people that God was about to keep his promise and send his Son into the world. All the Jewish people had been waiting for hundreds of years for the 'Messiah', as they called him, to arrive. It was so exciting to think that he might be on his way!

Well, I was walking by the river Jordan with John and another friend. John had been telling us that the previous day he had met his cousin Jesus. There wouldn't usually be anything too special about that, except that John told us that this Jesus was actually God's promised Son from heaven, the one everyone had been waiting for! Apparently John had baptized Jesus in the river, and when Jesus came up out of the water, a dove had flown down and landed on him and a loud voice had spoken from heaven. At that moment John knew for certain that at last the Messiah had arrived, although it must have seemed pretty strange that it was his cousin whom he used to play with when they were little!

Anyway, as we walked along, John suddenly stopped and looked straight at a man who was nearby. Then he shouted, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'

We knew immediately what he meant. We walked over to Jesus and began to follow him. He turned round