

CBC Traditional Service 07/12/25

**Reflection** on Scripture reading: Luke 2:22-35

**IN THE NAME OF THE BLESSED TRINITY, FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN**

You may be wondering why I have chosen to base this message on an event that clearly belongs after the birth of Jesus and here we are not even halfway through Advent. In my defence, I can point out that Christians don't seem very bothered to stick to the chronology of the Christmas stories. Only last week, the OtB team took into schools the story of the Angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she had been chosen to bear God's son. However, if you think about it, we should celebrate that event sometime around 25 March, though then it would often get in the way of Easter.

But let's focus on the new parents and their baby. After the drama of giving birth in a stable, and the excitement of a bunch of shepherds turning up in the middle of the night with a tale of the sky being full of angels, Mary and Joseph must have been glad to experience the normality of doing what everyone in their situation did. So after seven days there was the ceremony of circumcision and naming. After that, they had a few weeks to get used to a family routine until it was time to go to the Temple to present their baby to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice. This was what the Scriptures required and it's what everyone did whose firstborn was a boy. It was normal, it was ordinary.

That is, until old Simeon comes up, takes the baby in his arms and prays over him, giving thanks to God. Simeon has a blessing too for the parents, though what he added for Mary must have been deeply disturbing prophecy: “This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart.”

Why did Simeon do it? What was his motivation? Luke makes it clear that this encounter with the Son of God was not some off-the-cuff idea. He describes Simeon as a ‘good, God-fearing man who was waiting for Israel to be saved’. This identifies him as one of the remnant among the Jews in general who cultivated a personal relationship with God and believed the promises given by the Lord through the prophets. Simeon was therefore alert and responsive to the promptings of God's Spirit and eager to see the fulfilment of his long years of hoping and waiting.

This is what I think makes this an appropriate story for Advent. Isn't it for us a season of hoping and waiting? A time when we look forward hopefully to a time when God will wrap up the great drama of History in the return of his Son to reveal himself in Glory?

Meanwhile, let us ponder the example of Simeon. Everything that he says references the prophecies of Isaiah. His words reveal a deep familiarity with the book of Isaiah; they echo rather than quote the prophet directly and at least five connections can be traced to words recorded in that book of OT Scripture.

Do you remember what Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 12:2? "Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect."

That is what Simeon had done: he had let God transform his whole way of thinking by his prolonged and reverent study of Scripture. And we can do the same, by a four-stage process called Internalisation. In stage one, you don't know what you don't know. Before you become a Christian, your mind may be blank with regard to what Christians actually believe and what the Bible actually teaches. Typically, a new Christian will be at stage two: you know what you don't know. You've committed your life to God through putting your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but you realise that there's a lot more to living the Christian life. In stage three you know what you know: you're fairly familiar with the main contours of Christian teaching, but most of it is on the surface of your mind, it takes an effort of will to recall and apply a passage

of Scripture to a particular situation. But Simeon had reached stage four: he didn't know what he knew. That is, he didn't have to stop and think what Isaiah had said in chapter 8, or chapter 42, or chapter 52, because he had so completely absorbed the message of Isaiah about the Lord's Messiah that what Simeon said faithfully reflected what the prophet had taught.

But let me end with a little word of caution. If you eat without exercise, you will get fat; if you exercise without eating, you will waste away. We are called to be witnesses to God's salvation; a witness must know what they are witnessing to but also be ready to declare it in public. We must balance taking in with speaking out. As Peter says (1 Peter 3:15) "Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you". Through God's grace, may that be true of us. Amen.