

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, January 30, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 138, 56:1, 139, 137, 15.

Lessons: Leviticus 12:1-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Luke 2:21-35

Sermon Text: Luke 2:36-40

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What a remarkable woman! Here is an 84 year old woman who spends all her time in the Lord's temple, worshiping, praying, and fasting, dedicating her life to God. And now she has a chance to see the Savior of all mankind!

Today we look at

ANNA

- 1. She worshiped God, speaking of her faith to all who would listen.**
- 2. Now she can speak of the child Jesus who is the redemption of all who believe in him.**

This old woman is called a prophetess. There are references to prophetesses only ten times in Scripture: six in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament. In some of the Old Testament passages, it seems to be a reference to the wife of a prophet, as in the case of Isaiah.

A prophet is one who speaks, who proclaims the Word of God. Before the Scriptures were written down, especially before Christ was born, the prophets were anointed and appointed by God and received God's Word directly. The prophet Jeremiah speaks plainly of his role when he writes that the Lord said to him: "***You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.***" Jeremiah 1:7. In this sense, everyone who is called to proclaim "Thus saith the Lord" could be called a prophet. We find that is the sense in which Anna was a prophetess.

She was 84 years old, and had been married only seven years before she became a widow. She daily came to the temple, and we find in her an example of a very pious woman, one who was devoted to the worship and praise of the true God.

The occasion of our meeting her is when Jesus was brought to the temple at the age of 40 days, according to the Law of Moses, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson.

In this rite of purification, instituted and commanded as long as one thousand five hundred years earlier, God has a way of revealing his only-begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, to the Jews, to his chosen people. At the time of his birth he was revealed to the shepherds on the fields surrounding Bethlehem, and they proclaimed his holy birth to everyone they encountered. Now he is revealed in the temple, and Scripture especially records that this woman, Anna, as well as the old man Simeon praised God and then no doubt continued to proclaim and tell about the Savior all their lives. So we see that in everything God does and commands, he has a way of teaching mankind about the Savior he sent.

Perhaps Anna also heard Simeon praising God as you heard in our gospel lesson: *"And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."* (Luke 2:25-35, King James Version)

But the clear fact is that she, a woman, and not only the man Simeon praised God for the Savior. In this way God made provision for both men and women who came to the temple to hear from someone of their own sex who had seen the Savior about God's having sent the promised Messiah. You adults know from experience that women often gather together to talk, and men gather to talk, and sometimes find it more acceptable to talk among themselves rather than in mixed company. So this woman was surely telling others, and probably especially women who came to the temple about the Savior.

A number of Christian writers call Anna an evangelist in the early church who *"spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem"*. We have in her another example of women in Scripture who show great evangelistic zeal in telling and spreading the message of the gospel.

As a widow who apparently had no family – no children are mentioned – she would have had abundant time to talk about the Savior. There is no mention of any other activities or subject of conversation in her life either. What is emphasized is her telling *"all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem"* about the Savior. This was probably the chief subject of her life, since she had spent a great deal of time praying, fasting, and worshiping God day and night. What a great example of not just talking about the weather, or sports, or cooking, or the everyday things we spend so much time talking about. She talked about the Savior, the redeemer from sin. Her age, 84, was quite unusual considering what we are told was the typical life-span of people at the time Jesus was born. Even today someone of her age is rather uncommon. And to be so alert as to be able to tell about the Savior was a gift of God, too.

Her father and tribe are named, with Luke's attention to detail wherever it is available. She joined the group of Mary, Joseph, and Simeon. She had remained a widow after the death of her husband and was spending her time in serving the Lord. Though she was now eighty-four years old, she was obviously one of the first to enter the Temple in the morning after the opening of the gates, and all day long she was a devout worshiper, passing the hours in fasting and praying, and thus showing herself to be a true minister, a true servant of the Lord. *"She gave thanks to God"* at the time she saw the Savior. She continued the message which had been begun by the aged Simeon, praising God for having sent His Savior into the world, which was in such dire need of redemption. And she did not merely serve her own devotion and edification, but she spread the good news. She obviously made it a practice to speak of the fact of the Messiah's appearance to kindred spirits, as many as were still to be found in Jerusalem. For there were still some, if only a few, that were earnestly and prayerfully looking forward to the redemption from their sins, through the work of the Savior whom God would send.

One writer suggests that the Spirit of God's prophecy now began to revive at this time in history, a spirit of prophecy which had not been active in Israel for nearly 400 years. She was one who had understanding of the scriptures more other women, and it is likely that she made it her business to instruct the younger women in the

things of God. Though the time of the birth of Christ was a very degenerate age of the church, yet God had not left himself without witnesses.

She was ***“of the tribe of Asher,”*** which was in Galilee. This is interesting, since Scripture makes mention of the idea that people did not think that any prophets come out of Galilee! She had been widowed very young, after having been married for only seven years.

Some think she had lodgings in the courts of the temple, either in an alms-house, being maintained by the temple charities; or, perhaps that as a prophetess, she was lodged there, as in a proper place to be consulted and advised with by those that desired to know the Word of God. Others think her not departing from the temple means no more than that she was constantly there at the time of divine service. When any good work was to be done, she was ready to join in it. It is possible that she had an apartment of her own among the out-buildings of the temple. Besides her constant attendance at the public worship, she abounded in private devotions. Our text says ***“She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.”*** Yet it seems that she was provided for in some way, although none is mentioned.

She spent her days and nights concerned about the things of the Lord. She gave up herself completely to her devotions. She fasted. She spent her time in religious exercises which others spent in eating and drinking and sleeping. She not only observed the hours of prayer, but prayed night and day. She was always in a praying frame of mind, she lived a life of prayer, she gave herself to prayer. In this way she served God.

She ***“gave thanks to God”***, just as Simeon did, and perhaps like him, was now wishing to depart in peace, that is, to leave this life. But we know nothing further of her from Scripture. Perhaps the Lord called her to her eternal rest, perhaps the Lord permitted her to live and continue speaking boldly about the Savior from sin whom she had personally seen.

She was, after all, as Scripture tells us, a prophetess. She instructed others concerning Jesus, the Savior. She ***“spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”*** She believed the Messiah would come, and had now seen him. She talked about the Savior with ***“all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”*** Redemption from sin was the thing she and other believers wanted, waited for, and wished for. It was from Jerusalem that the word of the Lord was to go forth. (Isaiah 2:3) There were still some in Jerusalem who looked for redemption, and Anna possibly had acquaintance with many who were expecting the Messiah. She knew where to find them, or they where to find her, and she told them all the good news, that she had seen the Lord. This was great and glorious news.

In this way we see Anna, in an appropriate way, not usurping any authority from men in the church, proclaiming the gospel, being an evangelist, spreading the good news of the Savior.

In her we find an example for us, that we, too, should do all we can to bring the redemption Jesus won to others.

Lord, help us to give thanks to God and tell about the child who brings redemption for all mankind, that all may believe and be saved. Amen.