

Text: Luke 2:36-38

Title: “ADVENTure” Worship” Pt.2

ILLUSTRATION – I was in a department store last week checking out at the register and I noticed the man helping me looked weary. Discouragement was written all over his face. I asked him if it had been a hard week and he said yes, but every week is hard in retail. He went on to tell me that he had lost his IT job in the crash of 2008. Now in his mid-50s he was in retail ... the hardest job he ever had. It wasn't what he envisioned he would be doing at this stage in his life. I thanked him and tried to encourage him as I left. As I walked away I thought about how many people are like that ... discouraged, dreams dashed against the rocks of circumstances. I thought about the ray of light that Jesus brings into dark, hopeless lives like this man's life.

Let's turn again to Luke 2. The Advent is our celebration, our response, to the arrival of Jesus. Last week we saw the Advent through the eyes of a God-centered man named Simeon. Today we look at the Advent through the eyes of a God-centered woman named Anna. Remember that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem when he was just a few weeks old to be presented to the Lord as their first-born son. So Simeon, this elderly saint, knew by the revelation of the Holy Spirit that this baby was the Messiah. His heart was so overwhelmed with joy that he could hardly contain himself. He took the baby in his arms and worshipped and witnessed. But there's another person in the temple courts watching and listening to Simeon. After Simeon hands Jesus back to His parents, she walked up to them. **Read Luke 2:36-38.**

We don't know much about Anna. Her name means “grace,” an appropriate name for this saint. She's the daughter of Phanuel, who was from the tribe of Asher, one of the so-called “lost tribes” of Israel. We also know that she was an elderly widow of 84 years of age. She had only been married seven years when her husband died, and since then she had remained unmarried.

Let's not overlook people in this situation in life, particularly at this time of the year.

ILLUSTRATION – Recently I read in a journal produced by *Christianity Today* about a British medical doctor. His first name is Ishani and I can't pronounce his last name so I'll just refer to him as Dr. Ishani. He had an 82-year-old hospital patient named Doris. Two days before Christmas, Doris seemed healthy and ready to be released from the hospital. But for some reason she kept complaining about other health issues that seem to have no explanation. He ran more tests, but everything came back normal. When the doctor told her there was no reason for her to stay in the hospital, Doris looked down at the floor and quietly said, “I don't want to go home. It's just that I'm all alone and there are so many hours in the day.” Then after a long pause, she sighed and asked, “Doctor, can you give me a cure for loneliness?” Dr. Ishani later reflected on this incident:

“I wish I could say yes. I wish I could prescribe her some antidepressants and be satisfied that I had done my best, but the truth is she's not clinically depressed. It's just that she has been left behind by a world that no longer revolves around her, not even the littlest bit. There are thousands like her, men and women ... for whom time stands empty as they wait in homes full of silence They are no longer coveted by a society addicted to youth [Doris] is alone, and it brings home the truth of this epidemic that we have on our hands—an epidemic of loneliness The most difficult part is that I don't know how to solve this, although I wish I could. For now, I simply

retract my diagnoses. Sheepishly, I insist that Doris spends her Christmas this year on the ward, and I can see her mood lift.”

Well Anna was a woman who could have been depressed ... a old widow who lives alone. But instead her life is full of God. She lived alone, but she was not lonely. The Lord was her constant companion. That’s the only way you can make it through lonely times in life. So we find her face in the NT portrait of the Advent. She has a watchful eye for the things of God and the activity of God. How do you explain the fullness of this woman’s life? Notice...

1. ANNA’S ACTIVITY

Luke 2:37b - She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

Back in v.36 we’re told she is a prophetess, a woman who speaks inspired words from God. We only have a handful of prophetesses mentioned in the Bible. She was so consumed with the things of God that God could speak to her messages that were to be given to other people. Because she was a widow, and freed from responsibilities as a wife, she used that freedom to serve the Lord.

It says that she never left the temple, “but worshiped night and day...” She likely had a room somewhere in the temple courts which gave her ready access to the Court of Women where she could go and worship. Specifically she was “fasting and praying.”

Let me just say something about this powerful combination of prayer and fasting. Remember that one of the things we are focusing on in 2015 is Revival Praying. We’ve marked off January as “Thirty Days of Refreshing.” Acts 3:19 says to turn to God that days of refreshing may come from the Lord. One of most important ways we turn to the Lord is in prayer and fasting.

Fasting means to abstain from something like food for a period of time in order to devote yourself to seeking the Lord. (This is probably not the best time of the year to talk about fasting ... or maybe it is!) For instance you could skip lunch one day a week, find a quiet place and pray when you would usually be eating. Sometimes people will fast from other things that dominate their lives, like social media or watching television. Fasting means to refrain from one thing so you can focus on another thing, namely prayer to God.

Fasting and prayer go together. There are different words for prayer in the NT, and this one means to make urgent requests. It refers specifically to asking God for something that is desperately needed. Anna knew that her nation needed revival ... they needed the Messiah. And we may assume she was crying out to God to send His Anointed One to save His people from their sins.

Most of us don’t have the freedom to be in a prayer meeting all day like Anna; we have other duties as husbands and wives, moms and dads. So we’ll have to be more deliberate to find ways to build prayer into the regular pattern of our lives. God used Anna in an extraordinary way because she sought God in prayer in an extraordinary way. You will be amazed at the difference it will make if you will spend thirty minutes each day in seeking the Lord in the Word and in prayer. You’ll be amazed at the power God gives when we join together in times like our next Evening of Prayer and

Praise next Sunday evening. What a great way to finish out the year and find God's blessings for the New Year.

So the activity of Anna's life was continuous worship through fasting and prayer. Also notice...

2. ANNA'S ANTICIPATION

Luke 2:38 - Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Notice that Anna is looking forward to something. Both Simeon and Anna were yearning and longing for something ... for Someone. That yearning and longing drove them to prayer. I'm impressed that aging saints like Simeon and Anna are still on their tip-toes expecting the next thing God is going to do. They knew the coming of the Messiah was close and they didn't want to miss it. At the age of 84 Anna had every reason to give up hope. Instead she never stopped anticipating the next things God was going to do. She expected God to move.

Anna and Simeon were not alone in this. They were probably part of a group of faith-filled people that gathered in the Temple regularly to seek God and to pray for the Anointed One to come. The old biblical scholar Matthew Henry said that whenever God gets ready to do something great He always sets His people to praying. I'm asking God for a strong remnant of people who will believe God has next great thing ahead for us as His people.

Well, God honored Anna's seeking heart by letting her see the fulfillment of His promise of sending the Messiah. She "just so happened" to be there when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple. People like Anna always seem to be where the action is, spiritually speaking.

We also see...

3. ANNA'S ATTITUDE

Luke 2:38a - Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God...

Now here is a woman who had every reason to be negative and pessimistic. As a widow she knew sadness; she lived alone. Others in her situation feel like they have earned their right to be grumpy. Not Anna. She gave thanks. All the years of patiently praying and petitioning the Lord now gave way to gratitude to God for His answer to prayer.

This word for "thanks" is a word that is reserved for thanksgiving to God alone. We certainly thank others, but this is a word that was *reserved* for the One who alone *deserves* our highest gratitude.

In a few minutes we are going to share in the Lord's Supper. The Bible refers to the Lord's Supper in one place as the "cup of thanksgiving." Make sure you use this opportunity to thank God for sending Jesus into this world, and into your life.

Next we see...

4. ANNA'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Luke 2:38 - Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Remember Anna is a prophetess ... she speaks for God. When it says she “spoke” it means she kept on speaking. She just couldn’t stop talking about Jesus. She wanted and waited for the redemption of God’s people by the Messiah. Now that she saw it, she couldn’t stop talking about it.

And she spoke about this to “all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” Again, there was a remnant of faithful, believing Jews who eagerly expected and anticipated the coming of the Messiah. Anna spoke to them.

In v.25 we’re told that Simeon was looking for the same thing ... the consolation of Israel. And when he saw the baby Jesus he praised God because he had seen His salvation.

And this salvation is also our salvation. This redemption is our redemption. Jesus would grow into a man, live a sinless life and go on to die on the Cross to pay the price for our sins. So when we put our trust in Jesus this redemption is ours.

Ephesians 1:7 - In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace

LORD’S SUPPER – As we prepare to share in the Lord’s Supper what a great opportunity it is for us to give thanks for all that Christ has done for us. It’s also a time for us to speak to each other about what Christ came to do when He suffered for our sins, died and rose again.

1 Corinthians 11:23 - For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

1 Corinthians 11:24 - and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

1 Corinthians 11:25 - In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

1 Corinthians 11:26 - For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

The Lord’s Supper is to be observed by baptized believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe today you are burdened that you have never been saved. In the next few minutes perhaps you will bow your heart to Jesus. If you do, please come and tell me after the service. Take this moment now to prepare your heart for the observance of the Lord’s Supper.