

## Presentation of Our Lord

Text: Luke 2:22-40

Title: Old People

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There have always been old people in the church.

When I was growing up, I remember looking out over the sea of grey hair. There were some kids, a few teens, a decent number of middle aged folks, but the seniors were certainly over-represented.

And as far back as you go, there have always been old people in the church. Maybe not in the same percentage that we see today, but the elders have always played an important role in the life of the church.

Today, in the gospel reading, Jesus goes to church for the first time. Today is forty days after Christmas. Mary had been unclean since Jesus was born, and now, after the forty days are up, they come to the temple to make their offerings for purification.

And when they come to the temple, who do they meet? Some old people.

The first person they meet is Simeon. And Luke tells us four things from the outset about Simeon.

First, he's righteous. Simeon is a good guy. This is, of course, the work of God in His life, which we'll learn more about as we keep going, but he is a righteous man. This is the same word used for Zachariah and for Joseph of Arimathea. Simeon made good choices, he treated others fairly, and he kept God's law.

Second, Simeon is devout, he is pious, he is reverent. Simeon not only treats other people with respect, but he has respect for the Lord. He goes to the temple. He reads God's Word. He is in prayer. That is what it means to be devout.

Third, he's waiting for the consolation of Israel. Because Simeon was devout, he trusted in the Lord and was waiting for the Lord to keep His promises.

Fourth, he's filled with the Holy Spirit. This is where the first three characteristics of Simeon come from. It's not just that he's older and therefore wiser. It's not just that he's had a lot of life experiences that have shaped him into a nice guy. Simeon was righteous, Simeon was devout, Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel because he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's what's most important for all of us. There are some who think the church should be filled with young people, with families and young children. There are some who think the church should be filled with older people, more wise and mature. What we need in our church is not old

people, it's not young people, it's people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. People who are righteous and devout. People who can wait without getting impatient.

Often these traits are found in older people who have had years of learning and growth in God's Word. Other times they are found in younger people.

When we look at our congregation we shouldn't worry about how old or how young the people are, but are they righteous? Are they devout? Are they filled with the Holy Spirit?

But all of these qualities of Simeon aren't the main thing. He had received the promise that he would not die until he had met the Messiah. Simeon didn't come to the temple that day looking for a pat on the back. He came looking for Jesus. He wasn't focused on himself. He was focusing on looking for his Savior.

And then he found Him. He held Jesus in his arms. And he prayed his prayer, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace." Simeon was ready to die now, because he had held Jesus and seen the Lord's salvation with his own eyes.

This is your prayer, too, every week after the Lord's Supper, as you sing the Nunc Dimittis with Simeon, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." No matter how old you are, you are ready to depart in peace after receiving Jesus in the Lord's Supper. If you're old or sick and think that your death might be just around the corner, or if you're young and healthy and expect to have many, many years, you never know when your last hour will come. But you're ready, because you have held Jesus, just like Simeon.

And it wasn't just Simeon who was in church that day. Anna was there, too.

Now we assume that Simeon was old. It just makes sense, but Luke never comes right out and says it. He never directly says how old Simeon was.

But we know that Anna was old.

She was a widow, like of you are. She had been married for 7 years when her husband died. People married young back then, so she was probably around age twenty when she became a widow. And how old is she now? She's 84! You can do the math. She's been a widow for sixty or so years.

And so what does Anna do with her time as a widow? Did she stay at home and feel sorry for herself? Was she angry and bitter with God? No, she spends every day in the temple. She prays. She fasts. She's practically part of the furniture. Who's that over there? That's Anna, she's always here.

Every church has ladies like this. Often they are widows. Often they are older. And how do they choose to spend their time? Here at church.

Now this Anna in Luke reminds me of another Anna in our congregation. Ann O'Neal's not here this morning, so I can talk about her a little bit without embarrassing her. But there was a time last spring where Ann was here at church 11 days in a row, helping out with various things. That's just who she is. If there was something that needed to be done, she would do it, no questions asked. But most of all she was here to worship and to pray.

And what is it that Anna does at the temple that day? She doesn't put on a pot of coffee, she doesn't iron the vestments or sweep the floor. Those are important things to do, but she's got something even better. Anna talks.

Anna's words go in two directions.

First, Anna's words go up. She thanks God. This may seem a bit odd. What has God done for her? He took away her husband. She's been living alone for sixty years, and now she thanks God. She thanks Him for Jesus. Even though Jesus is only six weeks old, she knows that He's the one. She know what Jesus will do, and so she thanks Him even before He does it.

Second, Anna's words go out. She talks about Jesus to those who were waiting with her. She doesn't want anyone to miss what she is seeing.

Anna's words go up and they go out. She thanks God and she encourages the others. That's what you're here to do. To thank God and to encourage each other. No matter how old you are, this is what you are here to do. Thank God. Even if you've had a rough life. Even if you feel alone sometimes. Thank God for sending Jesus Christ to you. And then talk about Jesus to the others who are here. Anna didn't go knocking on doors and talking to strangers, but to the people who were already at the temple. There are people here at church today who need to be encouraged, who have been waiting for God to do some good in their lives. Don't worry about the people out there. Start with the people in here, people that you might sit next to or in front of every week. Speak a kind word to them about Jesus. Don't just talk about family or football or gripe about the weather. Talk about Jesus, that's what you're here to do.

So there is Simeon and there is Anna at the temple. But the most important thing is that Jesus is at the temple. Jesus is the one who gave Simeon and Anna hope. He gave them a reason to be at peace and to comfort one another.

Church is more than just a meeting of friends, nice folks who get together once a week to catch up on their lives. Church is a place to meet Jesus, to hold him in your arms, to see him at work, to hear His voice, to eat and drink His body and His blood and to leave refreshed and at peace.

Old people need that. Young people need that. This is where your Savior comes to you no matter who you are, so that you can depart in peace.