

## SERMON

Anna (Luke 2: 21 – 40)

This evening marks the start of a New Year of Sundays, it also marks the start of a series, a series looking at women of the Bible. We will not be looking into them all, but during the next few months we will be looking at ladies like

- Ruth
- Mary Magdalene
- Lydia
- Lois & Eunice
- Deborah
- Hannah

And finally the

- Women at the Cross

And of course the lady of tonight who is Anna. Now this is not a comprehensive list of all the women in the Bible. Some of the great women in the Bible are not even mentioned by name. We have Samson's mother who is visited by an angel to tell her of the birth of her special son, but we get to know the husband's name, Manoah, but never hers.

Right from the beginning men and women were designed to compliment each other, not compete with each other. We have now made it, at times, so competitive and we have the battle of the sexes not the working together of the sexes. This is not to say that men and women are the same but whether we go as far as to say that men are from Mars and women from Venus is another matter. The problem can be though that any generalised differences between the genders cannot be put down to nature or nurture. Are we born in certain ways or are we conditioned in certain ways as we grow up?

There are those that would want to blame everything on their genes – on what they have inherited. This would make things a lot easier because then the expression 'that's just the way I'm made' would mean that you would have to excuse bad behaviour on my part because I have no real control over it because it is in my DNA.

However there are those who if they cannot blame their DNA want to blame their upbringing. 'It was because of the way in my formative years that people wrote on my blank canvas of experience.' This usually means blaming parents or teachers.

We know that in our society there are differences between men and women, but whether it is due to nature or nurture it is very difficult to say. And of course the situation, the roles are changing as society changes and other influences come in. But will some things stay the same? Who knows?

So we look at various women to see what they have to teach all of us about God and how to live and be holy. And as I said the first lady we are looking at is Anna. What do we know about Anna?

She only appears in the part of the Bible that was read to us, in Luke 2, page 1028 in the church Bibles.

Parents – In verse 36 of Luke 2 we read

**“There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,”** (Luke 2:36 NIV)

Notice that we are told the father’s name, Phanuel, but not the mother’s name. This was because the lineage in a Hebrew family came through the father and not the mother. Israel was a male dominated society at the time of Jesus. So who is Phanuel? I wish that this evening I could tell you lots about him, but he is only mentioned in this verse.

Lineage – But we do know that she is from the tribe of Asher. Which did get me to asking a question. But some information before the question. The name Asher comes up some forty-three times in the Bible, all of them bar two in the Old Testament. The two in the New Testament are this one in Luke and one in Revelation where the twelve tribes of Israel are gone through. The other forty-one are all therefore, in the Old Testament.

Asher is a child of Jacob and Zilpah, Leah’s maidservant. And the tribe of Asher descended from that child. The tribe played a full part in the life of Israel during the wilderness wanderings and when the Israelites entered the Promised Land they were allocated some land. It was in the far north of the country, but one of the main trade routes came through the land. This was a mixed blessing as it meant that when there was peace they became wealthy, but when someone wanted the trade route they lost out.

But it was this that gave me the question. Earlier in Luke 2 we read

**“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.”**  
(Luke 2:1-3 NIV)

The census – this is why Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem in the first place, having travelled down from Nazareth. Remember also that this incident in the Temple occurred on day eight in the life of Jesus. So? If Anna was of the tribe of Asher, then just as Joseph and Mary came south because Joseph was of the tribe of Judah, Anna should have gone north. So why is she in Jerusalem? There are several answers perhaps

- She went north registered and they came straight home. But she is eighty-four at least, and going from Jerusalem to Asher land was no easy journey in those days.
- She did not go due to old age and infirmity and maybe was let off the journey.
- Her husband was of the tribe of Judah and so she was able to stay around in Jerusalem

We do not really know. It could have been any of the above, or none or even all?

Widow – so what do we know about Anna? We know she was eighty-four at least, which was a good age. We know that she had been married for seven years, so she had probably been a widow over sixty years minimum.

Children – What picture do you carry around with you of Anna?

When the name Anna and this story is read out, you first think of Simeon as being really old, and then Anna is one of the old, bent, gnarled women. It also says in verse 37

**“...She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.”**  
(Luke 2:37 NIV)

And then that she is in rags, very thin and one of these pious women who when there is any difficulty will always says, “Let’s pray about it and it will all turn out alright.”

Like the pious female member of a church who was just entering a carwash inside her car. The vehicle was a Chelsea tractor and next in line was the minister of the same church. The minister noticed that there was commotion in front of him. The woman who was driving was feverishly trying to wind up the window in her car, but her window would not close – it had got stuck. The only problem was that she had gone past the point of no return with the carwash. He then saw the woman praying and knew that she had said to her children, “Let’s pray about it and the window will close.” By this time the brushes has begun to go and the water was spurting out. The woman again tried the window but to no avail and then the minister saw something that made him cheer – in love of course. Just before the water hit the open window, he saw a bottom, a backside belonging to this lady sticking out of the window. Next Sunday the minister wanted to mention it so badly, but did not, out of fear of the woman’s wrath!

This is not to say that we should not pray about things, but some do go over the top and use prayer like a magic wand and it does not always happen like that. Remember that Anna had been praying for the redemption of Jerusalem for years and years and years. It had taken some sixty years for her prayers we assume to be answered – although that assumes she went to Temple and never left as soon as she was widowed.

However if she had of been married seven years, she could have had as many children. We hear nothing of her children, but there is no reason why did not have any, although at eighty-four she could have outlived them all! It may have been that she was widowed – brought up the children – then entered the Temple and lived there when her children were old enough to bring clean and new clothes to her, when the children could bring a daily supply of food to her. She may not have been as destitute as my picture of her is so often.

But all this is from silence, but what can we say of her.

Anna means *grace*. We do not know if she was born on a Tuesday or not!

**Monday's child is fair of face.  
Tuesday's child is full of grace.  
Wednesday's child is full of woe.  
Thursday's child has far to go.  
Friday's child is loving and giving.  
Saturday's child works hard for a living,  
But the child who is born on the Sabbath Day  
Is bonny and blithe and good and gay.**

But hopefully she was a woman full of grace, of a pleasing and pleasant personality. I would like to think so.

- **Patient** – she had been waiting so long but had never given up. How long do we pray for something before we give up? We live in an instant urgent age when people are not told to be patient. You can have what you want, now. Let us make our prayer life one of patience during this year. As I said this morning we have some big decisions to make about our buildings – let us be patient, but let us also pray about them
- **Prioritise - Put God first** – Anna was one who put God first. Her whole life was God. Now I know and we know that we need to work, in order to gain money, in order to buy food to live. But is God over everything in your life? Is God number one, or the last of people on your list? For Anna she was waiting and waiting with God because he was number one.

- **Pay Attention - Listened to God.** Anna had heard God say that Jesus was the redemption of Jerusalem. Do we hear God that clearly? Do we pay attention enough to God? Or is our prayer life one of dashing in to the presence of God, giving him the shopping list of things we want, then rushing away. But different people have different ways of doing it. Some sit quietly, some go for a walk, some begin by singing and/or reading the Bible. But do we pay attention to God? Those times when God speaks to you in unusual ways, that are alien to you. For me I am not a touchy feely person and so when I feel something is right or wrong I dig deep to find out, because I need to know with my head as well. Like the time Sue and I met a couple who had some weird thoughts, although they were feasible and they talked about eating the word of God and not wanting to be religious. This appealed to Sue and I at the time but then we had a Bible study with them and there was something not quite right, and then they told us that they wanted to begin their own 'right' church. We soon dropped of their list of potentials because we did not feel it was right and I know God spoke to me through those feelings, although I did back it up later with the Bible as well. Pay attention to God, as Anna did.
- **Perceptive - Looking Forward.** Anna was also perceptive – she was able to look forward. She looked at Jesus and we read in verse 38

**“...she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”** (Luke 2:38 NIV)

She could see into the future and as God's people we should never be tied to the here and now. We should be looking forward to:

- When Jesus is returning – when he comes again to claim his own
- To the future of the church here in Ashurst Drive – of that we spoke this morning.

Anna, a woman of God who though old still looked forward for the salvation of others. A woman who was very patient but kept on praying and listening to God. May we be more like her.

And finally – we never read of her again. She did not want the limelight, she did not make great play on her having met Jesus – she was prepared to play her part. Hopefully we too will have that spirit of grace – that spirit of Anna