

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

In Christ Jesus, who suffered in loneliness so that we might be received into the eternal family of God, dear fellow redeemed:

In Psalm 68 we read this description of our Savior God:

*Father of the fatherless and protector of widows*

*is God in his holy habitation.*

*God settles the solitary in a home;*

This certainly was fulfilled for the elderly humble believer by the name of Anna in our text for this evening. There is much we do not know about her, but would like to know. Here is what we do know: she was from one of the ten tribes of Israel that had been displaced by the Assyrians almost 1,000 years before, but somehow her family managed to reside in the southern kingdom of Judah where God's presence was to be found in the Temple; she was married for seven years and then became a widow; now on this day that the Christ Child was brought to the temple for dedication as the first-born son of Mary, Anna had reached the age of 84 years. It would appear she either resided in one of the Temple rooms that had been built relatively recently by Herod or she simply spent most of her waking hours attending and worshipping in the temple.

Things we would like to know might be, how old was Anna when she was married? Was she and her husband blessed with children and if so, where were they now in these days of her vocation as a constant temple attendant? Did she know Simeon prior to this eventful day? If so, did she know of the promise revealed to him by God that he would see the Lord's Christ before he would die?

We often picture Simeon as an old man, but there is nothing in this account that would give us that information. Just because he was told that he would not die until he saw the Lord's Christ, does not mean that his death was now imminent. Nevertheless, the promise was fulfilled for him just as God had revealed. For Anna on the other hand in her old age, death may very well have been imminent.

It would appear that she knew well who this Child was, whom Simeon took up in His arms and sang about with his "*Nunc Dimittis*" - "Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace ...". Anna in response we are told "began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him, i.e., the Christ Child, to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem." Her dedicated vocation as an attendant at the temple was richly blessed. Obviously she was waiting for this redemption personally and the Lord's Christ had come bringing everlasting peace between God and all of mankind, which included her.

Now in our old age as believers in Jesus as Savior we would probably all welcome such a dramatic and fulfilling experience as that which was granted to Anna, but for most of us it will be more mundane and maybe even downright lonely and depressing. But God promises to abide with us even in that depressing loneliness. As we just repeated with Moses in Psalm 90: "Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, That we may rejoice and be glad all our days." For most

of us, as probably was also the case with Anna, in our younger years we learned well about the mercy God has for us in His Son. We know of our many sins of thought, word and deed, which can never be hidden from God. But in His mercy He does not destroy us, but rather sends His Son to take the punishment we all deserve.

Living under this mercy found in Christ all our heavy burdens in this sinful life are lifted from us. Yes, we may be lonely in our old age, losing the person with whom we had been united into one flesh, losing our children to death or even broken relationships. In our loneliness we can be seized with the enormity of a lifetime of regrets and sorrowful memories, but our Lord brightens our hearts and minds with His promise of abiding with us in all His salvific blessings until the end of the age..

Right now your body is held in bondage in this life to deterioration and decay. Your mortality may begin to be declared to you softly in stiffness and bruises, then loudly with aching joints and cramps, and finally screamed out at you with a terminal diagnosis. You may look around and your friends are starting to disappear; your family becomes less attentive as a second and third generation urgently demand more time and attention. But your Lord Jesus knows what loneliness is like. Not only did His friends drop from the scene as He journeyed closer to Calvary, one even betrayed Him with a kiss and another within eye contact denied even knowing Him! Disdainful strangers were the only ones left to disrobe Him and clothe Him again, forced to bear His heavy burdens, offering Him painkillers when He could not take them, even giving Him something to drink in an attempt to quench an unquenchable eternal thirst. On the cross as darkness settled in on Him, He cried out in His greatest loneliness of all asking the Father about His eternal abandonment.

But in all of His loneliness, He did not sin once. He continued to trust that the Father loved Him and prayerfully committed His soul into the Father's loving hands. So our Lord does not abandon us as the times of loneliness settle in upon us, and for all the times we sin cursing God on account of our loneliness, real or perceived. We are forgiven through the holy blood of our Redeemer. His perfect trust in God our Savior is credited to us.

Now in these our days of companionship with fellow believers we need, like Anna, to receive the blessed comfort of forgiveness, life and salvation, so that we are prepared for those lonely days that may soon befall us. We often pray together that our Lord would "*grant us a blessed departure from this world*". Even though trapped in circumstances that leave us lonely, feeling abandoned, a blessed departure is granted all those who know and trust in their Redeemer. By His grace we trust that God will never abandon us for Jesus' sake, but will on that last day grant us a resurrection to His glory, when all things will be made new and the fellowship of the whole family of God will be experienced for all eternity. In this holy Christ Child, named the worst curser of loneliness, the worst distrustful suffering sinner as death approached, you are redeemed, bought back from the kingdom of dark loneliness and brought to His marvelous light into the family of God. This Lord abides with you your entire life, even unto your death. Redemption has come to you my brothers and sisters in Christ wherever you now live and where and how you must face your death. Jesus does not abandon you even in your sleep in the grave. He will come back and raise you to that full life secured for you for all eternity. Amen.