



## **Expectations**

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Year C, Pres. of Jesus in the Temple

Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 2:22-40

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Today we meet Simeon and Anna. Simeon, a righteous and devout man, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked forward to the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit had promised him he'd see the Lord's Messiah before his death. And we meet Anna, of a great age, long widowed, without children as far as we know, a devout woman, who lived in the temple. Anna looked forward to the redemption of Jerusalem, and worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer. It just so happens both appear in the temple at the time Jesus is presented. Both were waiting, both preparing for the time of consolation, of redemption that would come with the Messiah, the Saviour. Simeon and Anna lived expectantly in their time and context with hope and courage.

Their expectation was this would take place. Their lives a preparation for this moment, for the fulfilment of their expectations. There seem guidelines for living so to be holy, righteous and devout. A culture, a place with practices that supported and sustained their hope and expectation. Mary and Joseph step into this context, they take Jesus to the temple to fulfil their religious obligations according to the law of Moses. Simeon and Anna's responses arose within this context of tradition and practice, the wisdom of many years and many faithful witnesses.

Having clear expectations and living in ways to continually direct your attention toward them, perhaps opens and enables you to **recognise** the fulfilment of that expectation should, or when it occurs.

In this religious context of expectation, Rowan Williams suggests “The word ‘saviour’ meant ... someone who would bring back the golden age, who would put an end to conflict; you could almost say it was someone who would stop things happening. Salvation was the end of history, brought about by one unique charismatic leader.” Even though it’s part of our faith history “all these years later, the same language still survives. ...We have certainly not ... grown out of the fascination of saviours who will restore the good times.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the saviour Jesus reveals “arrives, but goes unrecognised. Hidden in poverty and insecurity, a displaced person. Instead of peace, the golden age restored, there’s conflict, a trial, a cross and a mysterious new dawn breaking unlike anything that has gone before.”

This saviour story doesn’t fulfil those long held expectations. Rather it tells of a completely other way. Interestingly it **includes** death and destruction, not denying such reality, but insisting that ultimately death and destruction won’t prevail. Despite all evidence to the contrary we experience in our short-lived years.

I wonder what **our** expectations are post-Christmas, in this Epiphany light-shining-in-the-world time. What we expect, with God come to life in the world, in human flesh. Especially when we say God can come to life now in real time through people like you and me. **And** that this **actually** changed and changes the world. How’s that looking in our world of looming darkness? Does it seem in the least bit a reasonable expectation? Given it arises out of a religious context, do

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<sup>1</sup> <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/957/archbishop-of-canterburys-christmas-sermon-2008.html>

we find the church a place that resources, strengthens, enables us to be bearers of hope, with courage to expect, in our context and time, that a way where justice prevails, **will** come into being.

Intellectually, theoretically, with words of conviction, we can affirm these are things we know. And well, sure, it makes a difference, changes the world. But, in our heart of hearts, is there a slippage of hope? It all seems too hard to imagine as possible in the world at the moment, too unlikely. I wonder if we've actually begun to think only darkness can overcome such darkness. What? That only a **more** powerful force would change anything, of course one with a rhetoric we uphold. In our fear, our fist clenched resistance, we want to do something, to push back, in the only ways we know. The ways of the powerful in the world that we see and know.

"The gospel tells us something hard to hear about this notion of saviour. There isn't going to be a single charismatic leader or a dedicated political campaign or a war to end all wars that will bring the golden age; history will end in the fullness of time, not at our behest, not when we think we've sorted all our problems out."<sup>2</sup>

This Jesus other way shows the world is changed as we let go, unclench our fists, open our hands for the flood and flow of life, of divine grace to pour forth into the world. We can't **do** this but we can **allow** this.

Through people like us the flow of divine grace can come into being. Not by physical force, not by manipulation or brilliant negotiation but by making this love and grace real. Real in relationships, in daily life, in each moment, in each context we find ourselves. Only in the heart of the ordinary vulnerability of human life can this be shown in such a way that saves us from the terrible temptation of confusing it with earthly power and success. Salvation is the stubborn insistence that

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

there is another order, another reality, at work in the midst of moral and political chaos.

To follow the Word made flesh is to embark, with fear and trembling on making history - not waiting for it to stop. To enact with courage, to insist, to embody the expectation that we can make real in our time the way of Jesus. This other way that nurtures and activates the best in us, in each other, in our world and wants for this. For life and flourishing. It asks of us a letting go, upending all we thought we knew, and asks us to live, vulnerable, this way.

### **Touched by an Angel**

We, unaccustomed to courage,  
exiles from delight  
live coiled in shells of loneliness  
until love leaves its high holy temple  
and comes into our sight  
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives  
and in its train come ecstasies  
old memories of pleasure  
ancient histories of pain.  
Yet if we are bold,  
love strikes away the chains of fear  
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity  
In the flush of love's light  
we dare be brave  
And suddenly we see  
that love costs all we are  
and will ever be.  
Yet it is only love  
which sets us free. —

Maya Angelou<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://allpoetry.com/Touched-By-An-Angel>