

Simeon

It was time for Mary and Joseph to take Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to God – it was a way of saying that Jesus now belonged completely to God.

At the same time as they arrived at the temple, an old guy called Simeon also showed up. Simeon had been waiting all his life for God to send the promised King, the Messiah, the Saviour, the One who would set his people free and bring light to the whole world; and God had assured Simeon that he would not die until he had seen this promised King. God did seem to be taking his time about it; he'd all but given up hope; some people had ridiculed his faith; but he'd kept on believing.

Simeon was a good man – a very close friend of God. And so he was able to see things as God saw them and he was able to see God at work when it was not so obvious to everyone else. So when he saw Jesus being brought to the temple by Mary and Joseph, he just knew that he was looking at the promised king, the Messiah, the Saviour. Simeon was so overjoyed that he took the baby Jesus in his arms and started thanking and praising God. It was such a special moment for him – he knew that God had finally kept his promise.

Being such a close friend of God, Simeon was able to tell Mary and Joseph that it was *this* child who would set his people free, *this* child who would bring light to the whole world. But he was also able to warn Mary: “Not everyone will recognise Jesus for who he is. He will be misunderstood, contradicted, rejected. What happens to him will bring you great sadness and break your heart.”

What an extraordinary child!

Anna

An ancient woman and a close friend of God, called Anna, was also there. She'd never left the temple for 84 years, worshipping there with prayer and fasting day and night and looking for a sign of the Messiah, the Saviour, the promised King, a hint of his coming – but nothing, only disappointments. She really must have felt she'd missed it and she must have asked herself if all those years of prayer and fasting had been worth it – years that went by as life drifted on. Until that day when, hobbling back through the temple after yet more prayers, suddenly she saw him and just knew that *this* child was the one God had sent to set his people free. And having seen him she told everyone else who was waiting for the Saviour that he had finally arrived with the coming of Jesus, finally arrived with the birth of *this* child – well, no wonder.

What an extraordinary child!

No old fogies

Simeon may have been old and Anna may have been ancient, but they weren't old fogies. They knew a thing or two. In fact, they were so in tune with God that they were able to see right to the heart of Christmas.

So we can take a leaf or two out of their book and get so in tune with God that we'll be able to see beyond our Christmas celebrations – beyond the turkey, beyond the presents, beyond the well-loved donkey of nativity plays – to the reason behind them: the Messiah, the Saviour, the promised King and God's goodness in sending him to show us how to live as friends of God, just as God has always wanted.

Old Simeon and ancient Anna knew that something special was happening when they saw Jesus. Their wisdom that day came partly from their experience of life and partly from knowing God and spending lots of time thinking and praying about the promises that he had made. When we spend time with God and think and pray about his promises, we too will become wise. We will see each Christmas as being about something far more marvellous than turkey and presents – and even donkeys: we will recognise that it's about Jesus and God's great goodness in sending him.