

## **Views from the Pews – Nunc dimitis**

In this youth-obsessed age, it is refreshing to encounter two elderly heroes, and that is what we did two weeks ago in Luke 2 from Verse 25 onwards. We can infer that Simeon was an elderly kaumatua because of his standing in the Temple and because he had been told that he would not see death until he had encountered the Messiah. Luke describes Anna as a 'very old woman', of probably more than 84.

Note though that neither elder dwells in the past, save to recall ancient prophecies. Simeon especially looks to the future, describing the infant Christ as a light 'that will be a revelation to the Gentiles and will be the glory of the people of Israel'. Older people are often stereotyped as harkers-back to the 'Good Old Days', when things were better, and to which the Church should urgently return. Neither Simeon nor Anna fit that stereotype. Both are devout Jews, confident in their Prophets, and to whom God's messengers communicated regularly. But both point to the future, and we note that Luke has them both using the future tense, rather than past or present.

So older parishioners have their role, not just as guardians of memory, but as witnesses to the future, messengers of truth. So walking-sticks and mobility scooters are part of our fabric.

But Anna's and Simeon's endorsement causes bewilderment and even dismay for some Christians who continue to wrestle with the position of modern Judaism. They ask how, with the unmistakable endorsement at the Presentation, can 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jewry not recognise the Messiah? Why the ambivalence?

One suspects that we could lock 20 Bishops and 20 Chief Rabbis in a room for a week and they still could not agree on an answer, so let us try one human theory just for this week.

God made us all unique, so while Simeon's eyes saw Salvation, other eyes saw other things through a variety of different lenses. Eyes too would have been coloured by the political situation. Wasn't the Messiah supposed to lead a military uprising? And how come his earthly body could be destroyed by the occupying Romans? Was Jesus just too fragile?

We doubt if Simeon or Anna would have retreated one iota, but others will have seen things differently and part of being Christian is to try and accommodate those perceptual differences.

*- Richard Swarbrick*