

Scripture: Luke 2:22–40 (Anna & Simeon at the Temple)

Main Idea: Like Anna the prophetess and Simeon, we are called to a prophetic task: to shine God's light into the world, revealing His faithfulness through lives that wait with faith, witness with joy, and embody hope.

Good morning everyone,

A couple of weeks ago, Josh rang to let me know we'd be celebrating the baptism of Eilish, and I can't think of anything more fitting for today's message. What a gift it is to welcome children into the family of Christ, a moment of joy and a beautiful sign of hope.

Over the past few weeks, Josh and Jeremy have helped us explore what it means to be a prophetic voice in our time. Josh reminded us that the prophets call us not to be shaped by the world, but grounded in the way of Jesus — slow to anger, quick to listen. Jeremy then urged us, through Micah's words, to live out what we already know God's asked us to do.

And today, as we celebrate Eilish's baptism, we're reminded that hope is something we live out every day, and because our God is a God of hope, we can live grounded, held, and sustained by Him.

It's this kind of hope I was reminded of recently in a song by one of my favourite musicians, Ellie Holcomb, called *Hope's Gonna Find You*.

One of the most important things we can have, but often the hardest to hold on to, is hope. But here's the truth and what the lyrics highlight: hope isn't just something we grasp at, God Himself is our hope, steady and faithful and carrying us through all things

Her lyrics go like this:

"I thought I had to hold on, that I had to stay strong,
but I don't, 'cause you've been holding onto me all along.
What if hope's not a rope you hold on to,
what if it's the arms that have always held you?"

Don't those words bring to mind the trusting and faith-filled hope of a child, just like Eilish, as they are safely held in loving arms?

If you've ever known that kind of hope, isn't it something you'd want everyone to experience?

Anna the prophetess and Simeon show us what that looks like, waiting with faith, trusting the God of hope, and using their prophetic voices to declare His faithfulness and Hope.

So first let's take a closer look at who Anna the prophetess and Simeon were.

They lived in a time when life was pretty hard for God's people. They were under Roman rule, weary, waiting and longing for deliverance. It had been nearly 400 years since the close of the Old Testament, yet they still clung to the promise of a Messiah. And at the heart of this waiting was the Temple in Jerusalem, the place people came to pray, sacrifice, and seek God's presence. And it's at this Temple in that atmosphere of waiting with expectation that we meet Anna and Simeon.

What I found interesting to learn here, is that scholars have suggested Luke's narrative may have come directly from Mary's own recollections. That could be why only in Luke do we get such a vivid glimpse into Jesus' early life — Luke's the only one, who tells us about Anna and Simeon, and this beautiful moment when Mary and Joseph bring their baby to the Temple.

And this isn't just a little part of the story right? Luke isn't just popping it in to his Gospel because he decided it would be fun to include part of a to do list, "Oh, and then they went to the Temple, they got the baby blessed and gave some doves and then they went home again." This is a pivotal moment, where two ordinary, faithful people encounter and recognise the arrival of the long-awaited promise of God right before their eyes.

First we meet Simeon, described as righteous and devout and being guided by the Holy Spirit. Simeon enters the Temple and recognises Jesus as the Messiah and takes Him in his arms, declaring, *"For my eyes have seen your salvation"* (Luke 2:30). After generations of waiting with hope, hope quite literally finds him and rests in his arms. What a beautiful way for God to answer a lifetime of prayer, fulfilling His promise so completely that Simeon then declares he can now rest in peace.

Luke then introduces Anna as the daughter of Phanuel, from the tribe of Asher. I think it's worth pointing out here that Luke includes this small but significant detail of her heritage for a reason. In very quick summary, Asher was one of the northern tribes of Israel that fell to Assyria and was to become one of the lost tribes of Israel. Yet here, generations later, we meet Anna, a remnant of His people, a descendant of that lost tribe, faithfully serving God in the Temple.

By including her lineage, Luke reminds us that our God is a God of redemption and hope, faithful to His promises and often working through the most unexpected people.

So having learned to listen to the nudges of the spirit, Anna, having dedicated her life to God through living in the Temple, finds herself in the right place at the right time. Luke says she "came up to them at that very moment, gave thanks to God, and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

I love how Luke suggests that she just doesn't hesitate. She gives thanks and immediately begins sharing the good news. In that moment, Anna becomes one of the first evangelists in the New Testament, ready, watching, and there when God moved.

I don't know about you but sometimes I like to imagine what the people in the Bible were like in their everyday moments. Can you picture Anna—maybe calm and contemplative, or perhaps the extrovert everyone knew by name, busying herself around the Temple and encouraging those around her? And Simeon, a little older, with kind eyes and quiet strength, carrying an aura of purpose wherever he went. And perhaps because Luke places them together in the story I think they could have been pretty good Temple buddies, chatting over the temple water cooler sharing updates on what the Spirit was doing and supporting one another as they continued to hope through those long decades.

But no matter their personalities were, we read that they stayed devoted day after day. Through their prayer, fasting, and connection with the Spirit, they were held by a deep and enduring hope, relying on it, trusting it, and letting it carry them. And it was because of that, that they could see God at work and share it with others.

I was thinking earlier that Anna and Simeon epitomises the surfers Josh and Jeremy talked about from their 24/7 Prayer trip. Anna and Simeon didn't just sit on the beach watching the ocean, no they spent their life waiting in the water on their surfboards ready for that wave, so when it came they could catch it.

So here's the question for us today: How can we cultivate that same faithful, expectant hope so that we too, can use our prophetic voice to speak God's hope into the world around us today?

I believe it comes down to three practices:

First, we are to wait with Faith

And this can be hard, right? Simeon waited faithfully for God's promise to arrive for years. And we know what that's like — waiting for direction, for things to make sense, for the breakthrough we've been praying for. But what Simeon shows us is that waiting isn't passive. It is patient, prayerful, and expectant. Waiting with faith doesn't mean sitting back and doing nothing; it means staying attentive to where the Spirit is moving, even in the ordinary. It's trusting that God is still at work, giving us what we need each day - the strength, courage, and hope to keep going. Anna and Simeon had learned what it meant to wait with faith, not idly, but with a daily rhythm of devotion.

As -----read out beautifully for us earlier, Isaiah also reminds us of the importance of hoping in the Lord. Because *“those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”* (Isaiah 40:31)

This is the kind of hope Anna and Simeon had, and it's the same hope that holds us today. PAUSE

Has anyone seen the New Zealand film released this year called *Tina*? it shared a powerful story, and I don't know about you but I needed a box of tissues. I won't give too much away, but the film follows the lead character, Mareta Percival, as she faces a devastating tragedy that plunges her into deep grief. We watch her feeling, at times, utterly devoid of hope. But over time, with encouragement and borrowed hope from those around her, she slowly steps back into music, and community, using her teaching gifts and her culture. As she rebuilds her life, her hope and faith begin to renew her strength, and that same hope starts to overflow, encouraging, uplifting, and touching the lives of those around her.

You know, sometimes we get so caught up in what's broken that we forget to notice what's beautiful. And when that happens, we need to pause and remember: we're being held, and we have hope. Because the Spirit who was with Anna and Simeon is with us too. It doesn't mean pretending everything's fine, but it means trusting that God is right there with us, even in the waiting.

And that same Spirit of hope is at work across our world today. We see glimpses of it in places of conflict and uncertainty, in peace talks being renewed, in hostages returning home, in small acts of compassion and courage. Waiting with faith often happens in the hardest places, when hope feels distant. So as we pray for those whose waiting feels unbearable, in nations torn by war, in communities weighed down by grief, or in neighbours, like Mareta who feel depleted of hope, we do so trusting that God's justice and peace are moving, even when we can't yet see the full picture.

Jesus told His disciples (this is from *Acts 1:7-8*) that “It's not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth.”

I love that, it's not for you to know the times. That's the kind of faith Anna and Simeon had. They didn't know when God would move, but through power of the holy spirit they waited with faith showing up and when the moment came, they couldn't help but overflow with joy.

Witnessing with Joy.

This brings us to the second practice Simeon and especially Anna the prophetess show us: witnessing with joy. To quickly come back to our visual of the faith-filled child being held in the loving arms of hope, can we now imagine that child turning and reaching out to others inviting them to come and experience the same hope they're being held by.

Anna gives us a beautiful example of this. The message translation says she “broke into an anthem of praise to God and talked about the child to all who were waiting.” This call to be a prophetic people who witness with joy echoes all through Scripture. From the psalms, we hear it again and again, joy turns into testimony. Miriam sings on the shores of the Red Sea, celebrating God’s deliverance. Hannah lifts her voice, rejoicing that God has heard her prayer. And through Isaiah, we hear that same heartbeat: *“Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things. Let this be known throughout the earth.”*

This is a thread that runs right through the story of the Bible and Paul encourages this kind of hope in his letters to the early churches. To the house churches in Rome he writes in Romans 15:13 “Now may God of hope fill you all with joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Like Anna and all those who came before her—and as Paul reminded the early churches—we’re called to witness with joy and share how the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. Remember Jesus even said to His disciples, “Let your light shine” (Matt 5:16). Like I said earlier, this doesn’t mean ignoring the hard stuff or pretending our pain isn’t real. It means noticing those moments of hope, and sharing them to encourage others, especially when they might be struggling.

Anna’s story truly is a beautiful reminder He can take every part of our lives, even the everyday stuff or the tough seasons, and use it to show His love to those around us. Wherever we are in our story, He’s weaving it all into something bigger, full of redemption and grace.

I’ve been so grateful to see this in our Couch Conversation evenings. Hearing stories of God’s faithfulness shared by women here who have walked through deeply challenging seasons, some still right in the middle of them. Their honesty and faith have shown me what it really means to wait with faith and witness with joy. Their stories have encouraged me so much in my own faith journey, especially this year. They’ve reminded me of the importance of staying close to God through those rhythm of devotion, like Anna did. This year I’ve had both the privilege and the heartache of walking alongside friends in really difficult seasons — sudden loss, deep grief, and one dear friend who is navigating the lasting changes that came after a stroke. It’s reminded me how fragile life can feel but It’s a powerful thing when we keep showing up, helping one another remember the joy that hope brings, especially when life feels heavy.

I came across a quote recently from Katherine Wolf, a woman with an incredible story of hope. She reminds us of something important, she said, “When the feeling of hope failed me, the habit of hope carried me.”

Like Simeon and Anna, we’re called to keep practicing hope, even when we don’t feel it. These rhythms of devotion, as my arrow coach reminded me, look different for everyone. For me, it can be as simple as popping in my AirPods and listening to worship music while walking our dog Tess up Mt Eden — and pausing at the top to listen and pray.

I actually did that this morning. As I listened to Ellie Holcomb’s song I mentioned earlier, my mind went back to times when I’d felt completely devoid of hope and I realised how this simple rhythm — this quiet practice — has been one of the ways the Holy Spirit has grown joy in me. As I sat there my eyes literally overflowed with gratitude.

It’s those small, quiet moments that help me stay close to God, tuning my heart to listen and notice where He’s at work. That’s where joy so often begins to grow. As it overflows, we get to share it.

Embodying Hope

This brings us to the third and final practice: embodying hope. To embody hope is to be a visible witness that God's hope is real and active in the world.

Even though Anna and Simeon were further along in years and had waited for decades, they remind us that every generation has something valuable to offer to those around them, and that God works in His timing. All of us, no matter our age and stage can embody hope. We can do this in the bigger moments, by faithfully persevering through hard seasons, but also in the little ones, noticing the daffodils or the blossoms, or children's laughter, and we can share this hope with others through our own stories of God's faithfulness or with a word of encouragement.

Kayla Craig, my favourite contemporary liturgist, writes that "the sacred has always lingered in the ordinary." This week in her reflection email, she continued on to compare our lives to diamonds, not flawless displays, but worn through generations of joy, loss, and resilience, so when God's light shines through us, even ordinary moments refract His love. You don't have to sparkle for anyone. Just turn toward the Light.

Isn't that such a beautiful picture she gives us? When we embody hope and lean on him letting it shape how we live and act, we refract His light, just as Anna and Simeon did.

As we celebrated Eilish's baptism this morning, we were reminded that hope isn't just a feeling, it's something we live out each day. Like Anna and Simeon, who waited with faith, witnessed with joy, and embodied hope, we're called to do the same.

In a weary and uncertain world, may we — as the Church and as individuals — turn toward the Light and lean into the God of hope who holds us, so we can shine His light in every moment, ordinary or extraordinary.

As we come to a time of worship, I'd love to leave you with a few questions to reflect on this week:

- How can we wait with faith? What little rhythms—prayers, moments of stillness, or daily habits—might help us remember that we don't have to hold onto hope ourselves, because Hope is the One holding us?
- Where can we witness with joy? What conversations or spaces could we use to share the hope we carry? Maybe think about where you've seen God's faithfulness in your life, and who you could encourage by sharing that story.
- And how might we embody hope? Who could we lift up, support, or simply notice with gratitude as we go about our day-to-day lives?

I'll end praying as Paul did - "Now may God of hope fill you all with joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."