

There used to be on TV a quiz programme called 'Ask the family' in which they would show an object photographed from an unusual angle and slowly the camera would pan out more and more revealing more of the object but still from an unusual angle to see if the people could work out what it was. They would look and be asked what it was. What do you see?

I'm sure you are familiar with the drawings, which look differently according to how you look at them.

So you see either an old lady or a pretty young woman. Do you know what I mean?

The question is what do you see? This morning's passage is a bit like that.

In v21 eight days after the birth of Jesus he had been circumcised and now, in v22, here are Mary and Joseph forty days after the birth bringing Jesus to the Temple partly for Mary's purification, partly to offer the appropriate redemption sacrifice and partly to offer the child to God.

There were many people there in the Temple but what did they see? Well they saw what you would expect another mother coming with another child to make the correct sacrifices. They saw a mother and baby.

On Monday evening I was wandering round the post-natal ward of the hospital with a group of others singing carols when a man came out holding a little bundle. Fortunately it had a blue hat on so I asked how old he was "seven hours" the man replied. What did I see – just a little scrap of humanity who as a boy following three girls clearly meant the world to his father.

So Mary and Joseph made their way into the Temple to observe the requirements of the law, for as we saw last Sunday morning, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law," (Gal 4:4-5). They were obedient to God's law.

As they came into the Temple they were seen by Simeon and he saw something different!

v25 describes Simeon wonderfully. Here is a man of God, devout and righteous, waiting to see what God has promised and under the power of God's Holy Spirit is able to see with God's eyes. Ask Simeon what do you see and he comes up with a very different answer to that which those around would have given and even that which many people today looking at Jesus would give. But what does he see. Well he sees the child Jesus.

Simeon took this child just a few weeks old into his arms as we see in v28 and he praised God.

The words we have in v29-32 have been used by Christians down the centuries under the title "Nunc Dimittis" from the Latin now dismiss. In it we understand very clearly how Simeon saw Jesus but first we need to note how he saw God the Father.

1. Simeon's view of God the Father

V29, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace." Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace." Simeon saw God as sovereign as Lord over the whole of creation and over his life, for he described himself as a servant. He also recognised the faithfulness of God, "as you have promised". God had promised to Simeon that before he died he would see the Messiah and now he did. Simeon had been willing to wait for God's timing, which as we saw last week was right and to wait patiently trusting God's faithfulness and accepting God's sovereignty. That sovereignty extended even to Simeon's very life, "you now dismiss your servant". His very life he saw was in God's hand and under God's will. As one preacher put it, "Here is true euthanasia. "Euthanasia" literally means a "good death". When you get to an age like Simeon, it is right to pray for God to give you a "good death"."

But of course it is his view of Jesus that is or focus this morning

2. Simeon's view of Jesus.

Here is where we stand amazed at what he saw in this little bundle that rested in his arms and what he saw he saw by the power of the Holy Spirit. He could ask God to end his life now because the point he was waiting for had arrived. There in his arms as we see in v30 was God's instrument of salvation. As he looked at the face of the child he saw the Messiah, the rescuer long promised by God and long awaited by his people and especially by Simeon.

But there was a second amazing insight given to Simeon for he saw that this saviour, born a Jew, was a saviour for all people. Just as the angels in 2:10 had said the birth was "good news of great joy for all the people" so here Simeon saw the saviour of "all the people". Yes v32 this child would be a light to the gentiles, the one who would reveal God to those outside the Jewish race and through that bring glory to Israel as gentiles came to the Saviour who had been born a Jew and through him would be incorporated into Israel – God's people.

3. Simeon's words to Mary

At the end of our passage Simeon turns his eyes from Jesus onto Mary and Joseph, who are described as his father and mother and he blessed them before speaking to Mary a warning that the child would become a stumbling block to many. Simeon warned her that many would oppose him and that opposition to him would cut deep into her as well.

We see in these Chapters that Mary's eyes were being opened to Jesus as well. In Chap 1 the angel had proclaimed his birth and nature. In 2:19 she pondered in her heart the story the shepherds had told of the angels visiting them. Here in v33 she marvelled at what Simeon had to say and now there was this warning of the pain to come presumably over his rejection and supremely at his death.

Here Simeon reveals what he sees of Jesus as the saviour but not without pain and suffering.

4. What do you see?

Simeon saw in this little child the Saviour of the world our prayer surely is that people in Chineham would have their eyes opened to see a saviour. Most of us here this morning have already seen that, we are in the know.

I haven't seen the film Chitty Chitty Bang Bang for years but in it there is a scene where in order to save the children from the castle where they are imprisoned the two main characters dress up as wooden dolls in music boxes and perform a dance.

As they dance they sing what do you see you people gazing at me? You see a doll in music box that's wound by a key. But of course watching the film and in the know you realise they are not dolls at all but real people. You know they are the rescuers. We may be in the same boat as we look at Jesus we do know him as our saviour and yet thousands around us don't and our prayer is that as Simeon's eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit to see Jesus as the Saviour and as our eyes have been opened by the same Holy Spirit to see Jesus as our Saviour so God would open the eyes of our friends, colleagues at work, neighbours and family to see Jesus as Saviour.

In John 12:21 we read how two Greek men came to Philip and said "Sir we would like to see Jesus" our desire should be that we might play our part in helping others to see Jesus.

But actually it should be our daily prayer also that we would see Jesus more clearly.

That we would see him as Sovereign and ourselves as his servants, people who are willing to submit our lives to him in his service in what ever way he calls. But also we would be faithful as Simeon was in waiting. I know Advent has finished but we still wait and look for the return of Jesus in great power and glory – or do we. “Sovereign Lord as you have promised...” He has promised to return and as his servants we should be watchful and ready for that return.

Later today, God willing, my grandson will be coming, probably with his parents. I will be watching and waiting for his coming eager for it. I am ashamed to say that I am not so eagerly awaiting the return of my Saviour and Lord. “He who testifies to these things says, Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).

Our prayer should be that we would see Jesus more clearly as Sovereign and also as Saviour of all peoples and so in our prayers, proclamation and presence to be seeking to point others to Jesus.

And then also to see him as the sacrifice for our sin that being drawn into his sacrifice we might grow in our love and devotion to him and be willing to “offer ourselves as living sacrifices which is our spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

Sovereign, Saviour and Sacrifice – this is Jesus for us but what do you see?