

6th of Christmas Octave 2020

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/123020.cfm>

1 JOHN 2:12-17

*I am writing to you, children,
because your sins have been forgiven for
his name's sake.*

*I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the
beginning.*

*I am writing to you, young men,
because you have conquered the Evil One.*

*I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.*

*I write to you, fathers, because you know
him who is from the beginning.*

*I write to you, young men,
because you are strong and the word of
God remains in you, and you have
conquered the Evil One.*

*Do not love the world or the things of the
world. If anyone loves the world, the love
of the Father is not in him.*

*For all that is in the world, sensual lust,
enticement for the eyes, and a
pretentious life, is not from the Father but
is from the world.*

*Yet the world and its enticement are
passing away. But whoever does the will
of God remains forever.*

PSALM 96:7-8A, 8B-9, 10

R. (11a) **Let the heavens be glad and the
earth rejoice!**

*Give to the LORD, you families of nations,
give to the LORD glory and praise;
give to the LORD the glory due his name!*

*Bring gifts, and enter his courts;
worship the LORD in holy attire.
Tremble before him, all the earth.*

*Say among the nations: The LORD is king.
He has made the world firm, not to be
moved;
he governs the peoples with equity.*

LUKE 2:36-40

*There was a prophetess, Anna,
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of
Asher.*

*She was advanced in years, having lived
seven years with her husband after her
marriage, and then as a widow until she
was eighty-four.*

*She never left the temple,
but worshiped night and day with fasting
and prayer.*

*And coming forward at that very time,
she gave thanks to God and spoke about
the child to all who were awaiting the
redemption of Jerusalem.*

*When they had fulfilled all the
prescriptions of the law of the Lord,
they returned to Galilee, to their own
town of Nazareth.*

*The child grew and became strong, filled
with wisdom; and the favor of God was
upon him.*

X

*There was a prophetess, Anna,
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.*

To understand Anna, I need to remind you of the first half of the story. We heard it in the reading from yesterday's Mass. The scene is the Temple in Jerusalem, the center of faith and life for pious Jews throughout the world. This is the place where two young parents bring their baby boy, Jesus, to present him to the Lord in thanksgiving and according to custom. May we always remember that Jesus' mission is rooted in his family's Jewish faith.

Of course, this is an exceptional boy, even if he was now only about 2 months old. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit through the fiat of his virgin mother. He was recognized by his mother's cousin as being her Lord, even as he was still being nurtured in his mother's womb. And while his bed at birth was a humble manger, his birth was accompanied with glorious angelic song and the arrival of shepherds who came upon hearing the news that their savior could be found lying in that manger.

And so, Jesus is brought to the Temple. Now there is only one Temple for the entire country. Might it be a busy place? Might it look like some of our older urban cathedrals which, with open doors, are frequented by the pious and the derelict with room for all the eccentricities (like you and me) in between?

And so, before the presentation rites were even to begin, he is spotted by the devout Simeon whose yearning for the Messiah was encouraged by the Holy Spirit's assurance.

Were there other babies there? Why would Simeon look for the Messiah in a baby anyways? That certainly wasn't the standard expectation. People were looking for another David, one who could slay Goliaths, lead armies and re-establish the kingdom.

And yet, Jesus is recognized as the long-awaited Messiah. Simeon sings his great *Nunc Dimittis* proclaiming his recognition of the anointed one of the Lord.

Jesus is also recognized by the prophetess, Anna. As I try to imagine myself at that scene, what about Jesus would make him so recognizable? His parents weren't claiming anything about him. There were no physical markings or royal tattoos.

It reminds me of other mysterious recognitions of Jesus later in his life: the centurion at the foot of the cross who proclaimed, *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"* (Mk 15:39) and when Thomas, upon coming face-to-face with the wounds of Christ resurrected, was the first of the disciples to proclaim, *"My Lord and my God!"* (Jn 20:28)

It is simple... and correct... to say that it is an action of the Holy Spirit, but how does that work? What's that look like, feel like, think like? Does it even touch on sight, feeling or thought? How much of that is of the creator and how much of the creature?

Well, that reminds me of my Grandma Hall's old saying, "There's none so deaf as those who will not hear." Not so with our Anna, the prophetess.

We do need to keep our eyes and hearts open. We need to be open to that which we never before had ever imagined.

Not much is said about Anna. There's no other mention of her in Scripture prior to or after this episode at the Temple. We know that she had experienced the bliss and trials of marriage and of the grief of a spouse's death. We know that she endured 60-some years of widowhood. We know she persevered through fasting and prayer. And she knew she could find solace in the Temple of her Lord.

I can think of several of my parishioners who fit that bill. May I be ever-attentive to their prophesies—they are particularly close to God.

And yet Anna did recognize Jesus for who he is.

*She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child
to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Check your Bibles, but Anna, by speaking about the child to all, is Christendom's first evangelist.ⁱ

May I be attentive to the Annas about me. May I be graced to recognize the Incarnation of Jesus about me. May I evangelize and share Christ with those about me. May they come to know Jesus' love and sacrifice through my love and sacrifice for them. May they receive the hope born of Jesus' birth, his passion, death and resurrection.

May we be inspired by our first evangelist, Anna the prophetess.

St. Anna, pray for us.

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ⁱ Michael F. Patella, O.S.B., *The Gospel According to Luke, New Collegeville Bible Commentary*, Liturgical Press, p. 21