# Text, arrow Description automatically generatedSermon Series – God with Us: New Hope

# Luke 2:22-38 27/12/20

## Kanye in the house (of worship)

Old mate **Kanye West** failed to make the cut for US President in 2020. But just last week he went back to his usual profession of rapping and dropped a new EP, unannounced upon the world.

He titled the new album, “Emmanuel”. Which, as most Christians will know, is a title given in the Gospel of Matthew (1:23) to Jesus at his birth. In Hebrew it means “God is with us”.

I chose this title for our New Year sermon series **before** Kanye went public! I wanted us to explore some of the Gospel passages about Jesus’ early life so we could **pause and wonder** at this great title drawn from Isaiah’s prophecies (7:14) long ago.

Kanye chose to go really “old school” with his music. The new album, he said, is inspired by **ancient and Latin** music. Kanye, usually a cutting-edge contemporary artist, has **reached back into older days** to find his wisdom.

## Listen to the elders

In our passage for study today, the Gospel of Luke goes “**old school**” too to bring us wisdom about the significance of Jesus. In Luke chapter 2 we meet two **senior citizens** of Jerusalem.

**Elderly** people have too often been treated with **disregard** and **disrespect** in 2020. **Not so** here in Bible – Luke puts old **Simeon** and old **Anna** centre-stage to tell us what it means to know God is with us in the Christ-child.

**Simeon** seems to have been ticking the **last item on his bucket list**. He sees Mary’s child declares to God…

‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:29,30).

Simeon’s words are often sung under a latin title “***Nunc Dimittis***” (meaning: now you dismiss). T.S. Eliot captured Simeon’s spirit in his Faber Christmas poem - ‘My life is light, waiting for the death wind,/ Like a feather on the back of my hand’. Simeon’s life is **complete** upon seeing the Christ.

**Anna’s** **age** is no secret either. Verse 36 tells us she was “of great age”, with Luke even providing notes on her ancestry and marital history.

More than just having advanced years in common, these two were obviously well known as having in common **prayerful-ness, faith-fullness, and hope-fullness** (2:25 and 2:37, 38)

They **were excellent role models** for the people of God. They lived disciplined lives in hope that God’s promises would be fulfilled.

Look at verses 25 and 26, 37 and 38

‘(**Simeon**) was **righteous** and **devout**, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.’ (2:25,26)

‘(**Anna**) never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.’ (2:37,38)

Even more than having devotion and hope in common, these two elders in Jerusalem were **regarded as prophets** role models

* **Simeon**’ status as prophet is seen in **his words** (for example, his prediction of Mary’s future pain – see John 19:25). Hebrew communities often looked to their elders to impart God’s wisdom from the Scriptures and to call people to stay true to God’s promises.
* **Anna** is specifically **given the title of a prophet** in vs. 36. This is a distinguished and rare title for a woman in ancient times, since according to Jewish tradition in the 1st Century there were only ‘seven prophetesses … Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther’). Luke is placing her among the great ones.

Their respective prophecies inform us of the significance of Mary’s child…

* **Simeon,** led by the Spirit of God, labels Jesus as “The **Salvation of God**” and the “**Light of revelation for the Nations**”. In his prophetic words are echoes of the great Prophet Isaiah (e.g. Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). In this child, by the guidance of God, Simeon recognizes God’s long-promised **rescue from sin and death,** and **the hope of new life in harmony with God.**
* **Anna** labels the Christ-child as **redeemer**. This word “redemption” reminds Hebrews of God (e.g. Isaiah 41:14). In vs 38 ‘She began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the **redemption of Jerusalem**.’ We also know that all ancient people were familiar with the marketplace practice of paying a **ransom** to free slaves. Jesus’ own self-description from Matthew 20:28 says he came “to give his life a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:28)

## The Gospel is “political”

Prophets were often **controversial figures**, often stirring the conscience of the nation, and persuading people to trust in God. But Simeon notes that this seemingly inoffensive child would one day be the **king of controversy**. He says of Jesus in Luke 2:34-35…

“This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him.”

We often forget that the prince of peace is by nature **divisive** – that is, Jesus’ message and life presents a challenge to our **ethics and our values** – to our very way of life. In other words, the Gospel ***is*** **political**.

In her Christmas message for 2020, Dr Robyn Whitaker makes this point. She reminds us that Australians generally like to suggest that religion is a **personal and private matter**. But, the Gospel writers place the birth of Jesus in a **political context**. Even the titles given Jesus of “Son of God”, “Lord”, inheritor of David’s “throne”, and “king” were “fighting words” to the ears of Roman citizens in New Testament times.

The nativity, says Whitaker, is “not a safe, children’s story of domestic happiness. It is the beginning of a longer narrative of power challenged, justice demanded, love proclaimed, and certain worldly values overturned.”

## The message is clear

We should listen to the **elders** in Luke’s Gospel. The two old prophets of Luke 2 point to God’s Son as God the **Redeemer**, and God the **Lord** in our midst. Jesus is, in their view, the divine **change-agent** for our world.

Kanye West, by choosing Latin titles and ancient sources for his new music may well have obscured the message of the Gospel once again.

But the Gospel of Luke makes things perfectly clear - as Jesus’ followers, we should walk in his footsteps to move in spaces that **challenge ungodly powers,** to advocate for **justice**, to proclaim **love**, and to promote godly **values**.

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