

6pm HC Sunday 1 February 2026

Malachi 3:1-5, Heb 2:14-end and Luke 2:22-40 – God’s salvation is not shrouded in secrecy but is revealed to God’s people through God’s people

I imagine Joseph and Mary feeling happiness and pride and a sense of taking part in a long-standing tradition as they went together to the Temple to give thanks for the arrival of Jesus, with that combination of joy and responsibility, heightened by a lack of sleep, that is felt by all new parents.

But Mary and Joseph know they are not ordinary parents, and theirs not an ordinary child. His arrival announced by an angel to his mother, conceived through the Holy Spirit, his birth heralded by a heavenly host of angels.... Visited in his crib by shepherds who tell them what they have been told by the angels, that he is **“a Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord”** and by wise men who ***knelt down and paid him homage and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, ...***

Surely, Mary and Joseph already know that their child is unique?

And then, in the Temple, Mary and Joseph are told by two more people that theirs is the long-awaited child who brings salvation and the redemption of Jerusalem.

God’s salvation is not shrouded in secrecy but is revealed to God’s people through God’s people.

For Mary and Joseph are told by Simeon that the Messiah will bring salvation ***prepared in the presence of all peoples, [and] a light for revelation to the Gentiles***, even as he comes ***for glory to your people Israel***.

Why do Mary and Joseph receive this further revelation of their child as the explanation and the fulfilment of centuries-old prophecy?

God’s plan for salvation has never been sequestered in secrecy, to be discovered only by those who have been entrusted with secret knowledge. If the saving grace of Jesus is a mystery, it is one that can be unlocked by anybody who is willing to ask questions; to think, to ponder, and to pray, as Simeon had done.

God's salvation is something that is revealed incrementally, one facet at a time. Something you've heard about, and which gradually becomes more and more apparent as something that is real, that you can rely upon, as you see more, and different, aspects of it.

For with the words of Simeon, shared with Mary and Joseph, here is the explanation of Isaiah's prophetic announcement of the servant who would be ***a light to the nations, that [the Lord's] salvation may reach to the end of the earth.***

Now the dots are being joined together.

For Simeon's announcement that this child will be the cause of ***the falling and the rising of many in Israel*** is the key to understanding the question asked in our reading from the prophet Malachi, 400 years earlier: ***who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?***

Because this Jesus will be, in the words from our reading from Malachi, ***like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.***

This Jesus will ***bear witness against*** those who break God's law.

Against the ones who set themselves up against God; the ones who cheat on those they have promised to love; the ones who tell lies; the ones who abuse the power they have over the powerless. This child will be the Mighty One of Mary's Song of Praise (the Magnificat), ***who has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; [who] has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.***

Simeon tells Mary and Joseph that this child will be ***a sign that will be opposed***, and his words reveal the far-reaching impact of this child, and how ***the inner thoughts of many will be revealed***. In the words of the Magnificat, Mary's Song of Praise, this child is the one who has ***scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.***

This is the child who will, as an adult, challenge the pride and complacency of those who claimed to have the authority of God to enforce God's law – the scribes and the Pharisees - but who somewhere along the way had lost sight of God's heart for his people. This is the living God who will search people's hearts.

So who were Simeon and Anna, who gave to Mary and Joseph confirmation of all that this child would grow up to do? Luke, ever the investigative journalist, tells us Anna was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and that she had been widowed and was now 84. But what was notable about Anna was that she ***never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day***. All we are told about Simeon is that he was ***looking forward to the consolation of Israel*** and that he was ***righteous and devout***.

Simeon and Anna were not part of the Temple's hierarchy. They were people who were ordinary in everything except their faith; faith that they practised so consistently that it was conspicuous. Simeon and Anna were positively looking for God to keep his promises, and they had enough confidence in God's faithfulness to declare when they saw those promises being kept. And their words are still being declared; Simeon's words are repeated at Evensong in churches up and down the land.

God's salvation is revealed to God's people through God's people.

God makes his loving-kindness and his saving plans for humanity known to his people, through his people, and through their (our) knowledge and understanding of promises made to his people centuries earlier. Simeon and Anna were both part of a chain of prophecy, stretching back centuries.

We too are a part of that chain of prophecy and insight. We grow into our understanding of God and of his goodness by connecting with his people, and by pondering on his promises. By praying God's promises into being and praising him for who he is and all he has done.