

# Jesus Presented in the Temple

## Age Profile

---

*Based on an address at St Bartholomew Longnor – 10 April 2025, Seeking the Kingdom on Foot*

### **Luke 2.22-38**

### **AGE PROFILE**

In seeking the goal that 'the age profile of each worshipping community should reflect the age profile of the community which it serves', we are aiming not for dry statistical accuracy, but rather to unfold a sense of intergenerational meeting, such as is wonderfully rich and multi-textured narrative; with its sense of completion and balance, of valuing the past / the old and looking forward to the future / the young, it holds before us a model of the Church at its fullest and most attractive.

This gospel passage is read at the Feast of Candlemas, forty days after Christmas and known in the West as the Presentation (or sometimes the Purification). In the Eastern Church, though, this day has the beautiful title of the 'Feast of Meeting' (*hypapante*), which so well expresses what it is all about: three generations, from the very old through the young adult to the newborn encounter one another; Jew and Gentile, past and present, God and humans encounter one another. The Church is called to be a place of meeting, and when we are truly that then we can enable meeting between others too.

In a society like ours where differences between the generations can feel so sharp, we need meeting places like this. For example, on the one hand we have a crisis of social care: older people can be fearful of being neglected or discarded in their old age, and the prospect of 'assisted dying' has added a still sharper edge to that. On the other hand, younger people facing a dysfunctional housing market can feel that it is impossible to get started in adult life, particularly in rural areas where social housing is in such short supply. The Church cannot solve these issues, but can bring generations together in meetings that help to dispel anxiety, resentment and antagonism.

We are called to be an intergenerational community, yet one shaped by grace, not by biology: Simeon, Anna, Joseph and Mary have no blood relationship one with another, and even the 'parenthood' found in the Holy Family follows a highly unusual pattern. Yet the Church is called not simply to welcome families to be itself a family: in this gospel passage we have a beautiful picture of the creation of a new family built on grace, promise and fulfilment – a pattern which will be seen again at the foot of the cross when Mary and John set up home together at Jesus' urging.

There is particular emphasis in the text on the details of Anna and Simeon's lives. Anna in particular is described with quite a full biography, raising the question of whether she may have been known to Luke or to somebody in his community. The way she is spoken of is a reminder of the particular place which was accorded to widows in the life of the early Church, while in the language used of both Simeon and Anna we see reflected the honour paid to old people and to single people among the first Christians.

However, it is really important to recognise that the number of years they have lived is not determinative for any of the characters in this scene. Their chronological ages do not in any way dictate their attitudes: the young Mary and Joseph come with respect for the tradition, while the aged Simeon and Anna both look forward in their expectations – the words of Simeon's 'Nunc Dimittis' are filled with a glorious sense of hope, while Anna speaks to all of 'looking for the redemption of Jerusalem'.

Above all, Luke's story is a very expansive account. The encounters he describes within the people of God are not boundaried by death: both Simeon, asking for peaceful release, and Mary, being told that a sword will pierce her own soul, point in different ways to death and to what lies beyond. That in itself is a reminder that to construct a full age profile for our churches we would need to include the generations who have gone before us; they too must be honoured in our life as a community reaching back into the past, as we also look ahead into the future to those who will come after us, and as by God's grace we stand with Simeon, Anna, Mary and Joseph on the brink of God's timeless eternity which has entered our world in the person of the infant Christ.

*How can we be intergenerational in a society divided by age?*

*How do old and young pray for one another?*