

I'm not just talking about the intense anticipation of your dream Christmas gift in the weeks leading up to that over-done season. High hopes go on fervently in many a heart and mind in these days. But let's go deeper.

There is a story in the Bible of two people who finally saw what they had longed for with a passion for many many years. It happened close after the very first Christmas, and teaches us how to hope correctly for a BIG Promise to be fulfilled.

As a vibrant, young Jewish girl, Anna was excited to marry a young man from the tribe of Levi. It meant he would be a priest and would have a career in the temple. No doubt they looked forward to having children, However, seven years later Anna's husband died, and she had no child.

Either Anna had no extended family to arrange another marriage for her, or she simply wanted to honour her husband's memory so much, that she did not marry. Instead, she served others, particularly at the temple. The priests and those from the tribe of Levi who carried on the duties with the sacrifices were all to be men, but you and I know that people quickly give place to a woman who doesn't mind doing clean up work,

preparing food, and the little things that make for good hospitality. I'm convinced that Anna found plenty to do and no one tried to get rid of her.

As Anna got older she did less of the physically demanding work, and more praying and talking with people who came to worship. Perhaps she acted as a hostess in the women's area. Women who hesitated to talk to the priest on duty would gladly seek her out. Anna was wise and practical and God gave her a gift of prophecy - that is akin to preaching God's truth to the people. She counseled well, and sometimes she even foretold the future.

One thing Anna knew among many others was that God has promised to send a Messiah to His people, and she was familiar with the prophecies in Isaiah that He would come as a baby born to a virgin. There may have been times when Anna wearied of waiting for this Messiah, but over the years her faith increased and grew stronger until she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, at age 84, that God would send this Saviour, and at exactly the right time, and that it would still happen in her lifetime!

There was also an elderly man, named Simeon, at the temple. We are not given the details of his earlier life. He

may have been a priest who could no longer carry out the demanding work of slaughtering sacrificial animals, and who had contented himself with memorizing God's Word, and talking about those precious promises with anyone who would listen to him. God gave Simeon a prophetic word for the people too from time to time. He also had grown to know and love the prophecies of the coming Messiah, and when you love the Lord God devotedly and have a grasp of how great and holy and powerful He is, then it becomes much easier to take God's promises as true as cash in hand. Simeon knew that he would not die before he saw the Messiah with his own eyes, for God's Spirit was upon him and had assured him of this.

I suspect Anna and Simeon often spoke together and encouraged one another in their faith. Somehow our faith grows deeper, richer, stronger, when we know someone else is also convinced of the same truth.

From their separate vantage points they watched especially as parents brought in their firstborn son, and made the offering that God had prescribed in the book of Exodus (13:12-16) for each creature, male or animal that first came out of a womb. If they were too poor,

they were to bring two doves.

One day Simeon spotted such a couple. The Spirit of God in him, revealed to him immediately that this child in their arms was the One. The Messiah! Simeon hurried toward them with arms outstretched! He was eager to hold this long-promised baby in his arms.

It wasn't as if Simeon thought this was the ultimate climax and now everything would be perfect all around.

Simeon was ready to die now, but he told Mary that this child was destined to cause the rise and falling of many in Israel, and would be a sign that would be spoken against, so that the motives of many would be revealed. And, he added, "A sword will pierce your own soul."

Anna was quickly on the scene too, and she burst into thanksgiving to God. Then she went about telling everyone who she knew was looking for the Redeemer too, about this child.

Returning to our present-day Christmases, think back; how many times did you NOT get what you had hoped to get? Was all your "believing" confidence enough? Was it well-placed?

That cycle of anticipating that you might get that gift you want, convincing yourself it will happen is really fantasy - perhaps mixed with some facts. Such as

the fact that you know if you plant clues and tips for what you want in certain people's minds they will come through for you.

What about on a spiritual plane?

A time may come, perhaps it already has for you, when you realize that you need Someone to forgive some crazy, very wrong things you have done or said. Your conscience tells you that this is far bigger than you, or any other people who are involved. You KNOW that you need someone with the authority and power to expunge those evil, sinful deeds out of your life, out of your very being.

If you tried to bottle it up, or hide it, or run away from it, the problem will only burst your seams at another place. It could be with bad health, or depression and either a racing into even worse deeds of evil, or a desire to end it all. Running from God is NOT the answer.

Instead, if you seek Him out in the Bible, or good Christian friends and those who know God personally, you will discover the awesome goodness, holiness and power of God, the Creator Being who made this universe and existed from before He invented time for us on this earth, and who will never cease. Not only is He flawless and unchanging, God is the complete fullness and essence of love

and mercy. He knew we would fail the test - that of being able to choose whether we would do good or evil - so He provided a way of Salvation through the gift of His Son, Jesus.

We don't have to be beautiful or educated or clever, or sinless - none of us would qualify. We just must humble ourselves low enough to admit we have sinned and need a Saviour to take the death sentence for us so that we come into God's holy presence with the holiness of Jesus Christ His own Son.

God is not reluctant to have us come! He eagerly awaits us, but He still wants people to make this choice to receive His gift of forgiveness and new life in Christ. He will not force it on us - but He will receive us enthusiastically and give His own Holy Spirit to abide in us and to help us live holy lives that please Him.

Anna and Simeon understood what a great thing it would be for the whole human race when God would send His Son to be born and to live and then to die for us. Their faith grew and was rewarded with the great hope they had watched and waited for so many years.

Is there nothing left for us to anticipate now since the Messiah has come?

Yes, there is! The next great event on God's agenda is to send Jesus again to receive unto Himself all Believers, the Church universal, and to take us up to Heaven for a wonderful feast. (There's something else to go on and on about! But, another time).

If you have received the gift of forgiveness and new life through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross, then you need to study up on this next coming of Jesus, and get full of anticipation and enthusiasm for that rapturous time when we shall see Jesus face to face. Not as a baby this time, but as a Husband for His Bride, the Church!

Like Anna and Simeon all believers should be anticipating Jesus calling for His Church in our lifetime. Jesus said to be watching and waiting with our lamps (faith) trimmed and bright. If we are caught spiritually sleeping, we'll be left behind!

Although we need not fast and pray all day and live in a church building, Let's keep our eyes and ears open for that trumpet sound. Then expect to leap up to meet Jesus in the air in a split second!

By Ruth Marlene Friesen
My Gift to You - Christmas 2011



When
Anticipation
Becomes **FAITH**

(my Christmas Gift to You)

Do you know what it's like to hope in a promise with such confidence that you can taste it? It's almost as if the promise is already kept and fulfilled.

Or, have you never had such faith? Is your life spent hoping for something - against walls of doubts and fears that it will never happen?

