**Ready**

*This is a monologue spoken by Anna who was in the temple with Simeon. It can be split into two where marked – if done together, the repeated section in square brackets at the start of the second part should be omitted.*

It won’t be long now. I’m ready to go. God is in charge. His Saviour is already here, and will soon be revealed.

How do I know? I’m one of the lucky few to whom he has already been revealed. Twelve years ago, in the temple.

I practically lived there. Why would I want to be anywhere else? What can you do with a long widowhood except praise God?

I was ready. Old Simeon had been told that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s anointed, and he was getting very frail, so it couldn’t be long now. And God was already on the move. He’d sent an angel with a message to Zachariah announcing good news. The poor man hadn’t believed him, and had been struck dumb until the promised son had been born to his wife Elizabeth in her old age.

Simeon and I had taken Zachariah home after he met the angel – he wasn’t in any state to go by himself, and he couldn’t speak to explain. And we’d gone back time and time again over the coming months, and learned of the announcement of a prophet who would prepare the way for Messiah. What times of prayer and praise we had together in that home – even though Zachariah still could not speak!

After about 6 months, when Elizabeth was finding it difficult to move around as her pregnancy advanced, we were delighted to find that her god-daughter Mary had come to look after her – a young woman of faith, who was devoted to Elizabeth, joined in the prayer and praise, and who was obviously going to be a wonderful godmother to young John. There was something mysterious about her – an inner smile, and yet some sort of inner trouble. You never could understand the young!

It was only about six months after Mary had returned home, that she walked into the temple with a husband and baby to be consecrated. My heart leapt! But first I had to stop Simeon putting his foot in it.

“I’d no idea you were married,” he was saying. “It’s only a few months since we saw you at Zachariah and Elizabeth’s.”

“Now, Joseph,” I interrupted, “why don’t you take Mary and Jesus to the office to arrange the ceremony, and we’ll catch up with you later?”

As soon as they’d gone, I turned to Simeon. “Simeon, you’re a prize turnip!”

“What do you mean? How can she have got married and had a baby since we last saw her? I wouldn’t have thought it of her!”

“Open your eyes. What is the child called?”

“Jesus.”

“And what does that mean?”

“He saves.”

“And what have we been waiting for? A Saviour who is Christ the Lord?”

And at last the penny dropped. So when Joseph and Mary took Jesus up to the sanctuary to present him to the Lord, Simeon hobbled up to them and took the baby in his arms and looked up to heaven.

“Sovereign Lord,” he said, “I can die a happy man now, because I have seen your Saviour with my own eyes, the one you have prepared to fulfil your purposes. He will be a light for the whole world, and the glory of God’s people Israel.”

Simeon died shortly after that, with a smile on his face. Then there was that terrible business when Herod sent his soldiers to murder all the baby boys in Bethlehem.

And I‘ve heard nothing more since then. I have just had to trust that God is in charge – he must have kept the child safe.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

[I‘ve heard nothing more since then. I have just had to trust that God is in charge – he must have kept the child safe.] Until today.

Simeon’s son Nathaniel came round to see me today. He’s a priest at the temple, like his father, who told him the whole story. He was beaming from ear to ear, bursting with news. I made him wait until I’d got him a drink and a cake.

“The whole temple has been abuzzing for the last three days,” he said.

“Doesn’t it still go quiet at the end of the Festival?” I asked.

“Normally, but not this time. The teachers of the law have been busy.”

“You’re teasing me. You obviously want me to ask why they’ve been busy.”

“Well, go on then.”

“All right then. What have they been busy with?”

“Questions.”

“What sort of questions?”

“Questions about the law. What it really means.”

“That’s what they’re meant to be teaching.”

“Yes, but this was different.”

“How so?”

“The questioner. He seemed to understand the law better than the teachers.”

“That wouldn’t be difficult with some of them.”

“No, but not all. His questions put them on the spot.”

“What do you mean?”

“He speaks with authority.”

“Who is this questioner?”

“A boy. Not far short of his Bar Mitzvah.”

“Is this who I think it is?”

“His parents came to pick him up today. They were frantic. They’d been searching for him for three days.”

“I should think they were. How did he respond?”

“He was baffled. ‘Didn’t you realise I would be in my Father’s house?’ he said.”

“No!”

“I took them aside, and said to them, ‘You don’t need to worry. Be sure of this, the Lord has visited and redeemed his people.’”

“Zachariah’s exact words!”

“They stared at me and asked, ‘How do you know?’

“’’My father Simeon told me. Mary and Joseph, be sure of this, every word spoken about this boy will come true. And I will be calling on Anna today with good news. Now may the Lord bless you and keep you.’ So I bring you their greetings.”

“And now I can die a happy woman, for the Lord has come to his temple.”