

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Lord, our King and Our Redeemer.

Babies—well, we were all one once. I'm sure if you've ever had one or been in a family with one, you'll know all about the joy they bring to a household, even as we heard this morning with some gardening experiences. But they are also a responsibility. There are lots of things you have to do—formal and informal. In Mary and Joseph's time, there were three ceremonies that had to be performed. There were only two things you were allowed to do on the Sabbath involving life and death. One was related to something that had died, and the other was in the case of the birth of a child. The birth of a child was so precious that even the Sabbath law made allowances for it.

For a male child, there were three ceremonies: circumcision, redemption, and purification. You had to bring an offering, usually pigeons if you were poor, or turtle doves if you could afford them—unless they were on special offer that week! Mary and Joseph did what was required. For us today, we have similar things to do for a child: registration being the first within a few weeks, which is a legal requirement. Hopefully, in the church, we have the rite of baptism.

Next week, we'll be baptising another little one here at church at the end of the service. It's a rite of passage—part of welcoming, part of recognising who these people are. At the end of that process, you get one of these—a birth certificate. This one happens to belong to me. It hasn't quite gone brown and yellow at the edges yet, but it's getting there.

It lists the name of the father, mother, and occupation. I wonder what they would have put on Jesus's birth certificate. Mother: Mary of Nazareth. Occupation of Father: Lord God Almighty. Not sure they could have spelt all of that! Imagine Jesus registering for his first passport.

This document is special to me, partly because it's not quite true. Let me explain. Something true this week: I went to a friend's house, and they never once offered me a cup of tea. Shocking! But the truth is, I rarely drink tea; I'm a coffee drinker. True, but with a twist.

On my birth certificate, it says my father's occupation was "Senior Scientific Assistant, Post Office." Our dad did drive one of those little green Post Office vans, but it had nothing to do with the Post Office. We now know Dad was working for MI5 during the height of the Cold War. His cover was working for the Post Office.

There's a film called *Ring of Spies*, about the Portland spy ring, where Russian spies extracted secrets about submarines from Southampton and Portsmouth. They passed that information on to Russia. Those spies had set up a safe house in Rye—right down the road from the MI5 headquarters!

Thanks to the work of our dad, they were caught. There's a scene in the film where the spies meet in a cinema in North London. The family story goes that Dad was summoned to go there on his bicycle because nobody would suspect someone on a bike. They caught the spies red-handed, transmitting secret messages to Russia. Some say that was Dad's finest hour—months of planning, careful watching, and intelligence gathering.

Now, we come to Simeon in the temple in Jerusalem. Was this his finest hour? He had been waiting and waiting, knowing that one day he would see what had been promised to him—the Christ, the Saviour of the world. One day, the parents would walk into the temple with a little baby boy, and he would know that this was no ordinary child—this was Emmanuel, the Messiah.

Simeon had been waiting patiently for years, along with Anna and others known as the "Quiet of the Land." These were devout people who sat, waited, prayed, and asked God for the fulfilment of His promise. One day, it happened.

Imagine Simeon proclaiming these words in the temple: "*A light for revelation to the Gentiles.*" That's us—anyone who isn't from Israel. This message applies to us as much today as it did back then. The child's father and mother were amazed—utterly shocked, puzzled, and concerned about what it all meant.

Jesus is called the *consolation of Israel*, the same word used for the Holy Spirit—the Comforter. These words are revolutionary. They changed the course of history. "*My eyes have seen your salvation, a light for the revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.*"

Let me ask you two questions:

What are you waiting for? Simeon and Anna spent a lifetime waiting. What are you waiting for? Christmas? Your birthday? What are your hopes and expectations?

Have you seen Jesus? Simeon did. Mary and Joseph did. Have you seen Him lately? Was He in that garden, digging and planting? Was He in that beautiful sunset, a handshake, a kind word, a gift, or a prayer? This week, let's look out for Jesus. Whatever you're waiting for, may the Lord bless you and grant you the desires of your heart.

Let us pray.