

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ANNA: LESSON SIX

by Sandy Harber

"And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord...." Luke 2:38a

Anna was present in the Temple at the "instant" that Jesus was presented to the priest as Mary's first-born son. Simeon had been led by the Holy Spirit into the Court of Women to behold God's Anointed (Lk. 2:27). He had taken the baby into his arms and rejoiced, praising and thanking God that he had lived to see the "consolation of Israel" (Lk. 2:25-26). Anna joined him in thanksgiving.

"Consolation" means "comfort." In Greek the word is "papaklesis" and is akin to the word "parakletos," translated "comforter" in John 14:16 and 26. At the Last Supper Jesus told His disciples that He would pray for God the Father to send another Comforter to them because He would be going away (via the cross). In verse 26 He identifies the other Comforter as the Holy Spirit. God the Father sent God the Son into the world to bring comfort. He did this by breaking down the sin barrier that stood between God and mankind, allowing God to forgive sins on the basis of Christ's blood sacrifice, restoring peace and fellowship that was lost at the Fall. When Jesus ascended up to heaven, the Father sent another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to be Teacher, Guide, and Counselor to the millions who accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Anna served in the Temple 84 years, praying and fasting. No doubt, like Simeon, she was watching for the Christ to appear. And, on that day, her vigilance and dedication was rewarded when a poor family appeared at the Temple to fulfill their obligations under the Law of Moses. First, the 41 day old son of Mary was presented and redeemed as a first-born son of Israel. Then, Mary completed the prescribed steps for her purification. In the outer-most court, the Court of Gentiles, Mary would have purchased two turtledoves for her purification ceremony. The cost for the birds is not given here but Matthew records the purchase price as a farthing (Mt. 10:29). Mary, Joseph, and Jesus would proceed into the next court, the Court of Women, where Mary would cast her farthing (or 2 mites, which equals a farthing) into the third treasure chest.

Around the parameter of the Court of Women 13 trumpet-shaped treasury chests were set against the walls. Each treasure chest was shaped like a trumpet with a slender opening and wider bottom. They were numbered 1 to 13 and each was designated for a specific type of offering. Trumpet 3 was designed for the purchase of sacrificial birds. One bird would serve as a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. The sin offering was always a bird. But the wealthy would offer a lamb for the burnt offering. Those who were not financially well-off, like Mary, offered a second bird. At a certain time of day the 3rd trumpet chest was opened and the money was split, half paying for the sin offerings and half the burnt offerings. The sound of the organ announced that incense was about to be kindled on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. This sound also summoned the women who were there to take part in the purification ceremony. The women ascended to the top of the 15 steps that led from the Court of Women to the Court of Israel. A lay person, called a "station-man," would arrange the women within the wickets of the Nicanor Gate that separated the Court of Israel from the Court of Women. From this vantage point the women could watch the activities of the priests.

The Court of Israel was separated from the Court of Priests by a short wall. The Court of Priests surrounded the Temple itself. The Brazen Altar, on which the sacrifices were burnt, lay within the Court of Priests. The women could watch the actions of the priests as they made sacrifices on their behalf.

With their business concluded, Mary and Joseph exited the Temple complex taking little baby Jesus with them. Imagine how Anna and Simeon must have felt that day. Elated that God had blessed them with a glimpse of His Salvation. But, perhaps, desolated as well as they watched the child they had waited for so long depart. They probably wanted to hold on to Him a little longer. Gaze on His sweet little face. Rejoice in His presence. Some day we are going to gaze on that sweet face. And when we do, we will forget all the trials of this life. All our grief and sorrow will seem like nothing compared to the great joy we will feel in His presence. When this life gets you down, remember the best is yet to come.

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Galatians 6:9