

Good morning

Have you ever had a dream come true?

What sort of dream was it? A dream of a young boy or girl, or was it the dream of a young adult, setting out on their life journey, or is it something that with maturity and wisdom you now hope and dream for?

Have you aimed for something, longed for something and then finally, it has happened, there is that sense of fulfilment, a sense of satisfaction, this is what you have always wanted, but then the, and now what?

Or have you had a dream and given up on it, settled for something else, perhaps something less? Do you now look back and wished you had kept the dream alive?

Perhaps you have never been one for dreaming, preferring instead to practically deal with everything that comes along, dreams are for other people.

Today we hear about someone who had waited, we don't know whether it was patiently or impatiently, he'd had a dream or a prophecy, and he has been waiting for that dream to be fulfilled.

Today we hear about Simeon who is waiting, who has waited, for years and years. He knows that he will

meet with the Messiah before he will die and he has waited faithfully, but he is old and tired, and still he waits.

Then we hear the story of Mary and Joseph going to the temple holding their new baby boy.

Who do you think Simeon was looking for that day?

He was visiting the Temple as he had day after day, year after year, looking, watching and waiting.

Was he expecting a young, strong, charismatic man to come striding in, catching everyone's attention, changing the atmosphere in the temple, drawing attention to himself so that even those who were not looking for him would be drawn towards him. They would all know, he would stand surrounded by people, the assurance of his authority and destiny creating an aura around him, an aura that touched all those who were visiting the temple that day.

The trouble with waiting for dreams to come is that the imagination can go mad and you can dream up all sorts of scenarios.

On this morning then, Simeon is at the Temple, watching and waiting as he has for years, perhaps this time the Temple feels a little different, he can't say what is different but something has shifted, there is a

change in the very air he breathes, an expectation, but then is that the muddled musings of an old man?

Did he know even then, did he know that his dream would come true that day?

His eyes are eventually drawn towards a young woman and her husband entering the temple. There is nothing unusual about them, they walk in together, the young woman carrying a tiny baby, a sight he has seen year in and year out, all young couples proudly bring their first born babies to be presented, it is nothing unusual.

But this day, this day, there is something that draws Simeon closer, he walks slowly through the crowd trying to ensure that he doesn't lose sight of them, weaving in and out through the throngs, until eventually he meets them.

He welcomes the young couple and takes this seemingly unremarkable baby in his arms and as he looks down into the face of this small baby, he utters the words we still hear regularly in the Nunc Dimittus,

"Now let thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel."

His dream had come true, not perhaps in the way that he was expecting, this child was a very small package in which to hold the salvation of the world...but as the saying goes, the best things come in small packages.

His dream had come true.

He knew that his life was coming to an end, he was old and tired, but he had seen his dream fulfilled.

But as I was thinking about this meeting, about the expectation, the phrase be careful what you wish for, pops up.

Be careful what you wish for.

I was listening to Sarah Joseph's, Editor of a Muslim lifestyle magazine:

Pause for thought on Thursday

She said

Perhaps three years of my daughter's continuous health problems had got to me; perhaps it was the long winter months; perhaps I was just tired – but late last year, I wasn't in the best of places. Life felt so difficult and dark. It was as if the colour had gone out, and every day was a fight just to get up.

"I'm struggling down here" I told God, and then I made

a rather unimaginative request. Instead of asking for help, or relief, I prayed “Could you give me the flu?”

If I could sleep for a week, maybe everything would feel better, I reasoned to myself.

God didn’t give me the flu. Instead, a week later, I found a lump.

I waited a week. Perhaps it would go away, I thought. It didn’t.

I called the doctor’s, and less than an hour later I was sitting with my GP who confirmed it needed investigating, and referred me directly to a specialist. I went home. I pondered, and planned. My eyes drank in my children. They seemed extraordinarily beautiful.

Now she went on to say that the tests were fine, but also that God doesn’t give us what we want, but rather what we need. For her the lump helped her to realise that life is a wonderful gift that shouldn’t be taken for granted. It is beautiful, and something to fight for.

But what has this to do with Simeon?

Well in just the same way as Sarah had her prayer fulfilled so did Simeon, but in just the same way, , there was the other side to the joy of a dream answered; as he is offering his life up to God, as he is saying that he has seen the one for whom he has

waited, he is also saying those harder words to Mary.

Words about her son and her own suffering as a sword would pierce her soul; sometimes having our prayers answered has unforeseen affects on people around us.

But there is another person, with yet another reason for being there. Anna is one of those people who find a home in a sacred space. The temple is where she belongs. When I hear of Anna I think of the old ladies in churches on the continent, often dressed in black, just sitting there in the cool, Anna represents all those people who find shelter in sacred space. She just walks past at the right time and, perhaps because she heard what Simeon said rather than because of any particular revelation she had herself, she too praises God and also speaks about it to the people around.

So we have four people and a baby, all of whose lives were touched in some way by this unplanned meeting in the temple. Out of it came the festival we know as the Presentation of Christ in the temple and the Nunc Dimittis.

It is also the hinge when we turn from Christmas to look towards Lent, Holy Week and the passion of this child, the light of the world. And so there is a bitter-sweetness about today, a poignancy as, like Mary, we take in the fact that the joy at this child's birth will soon have to embrace, too, the pain of a sword piercing the soul.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna had very different reasons for being in the temple that day. The intersection of their stories in this one brief encounter assures us that no gathering in God's presence is random.

Think about what has brought you here today, think about your hopes and dreams, are we willing to give them up to God, and to be content to let God guide us and to fulfill them in the way that He thinks we need.

Can we like Simeon, be willing to be presented, to be still before God in this holy place and open to letting events unfold.

Amen