On the front of your order of service you will see a depiction of Simeon, from our gospel reading by the artist Rembrandt. The ageing Simeon, very overtly the focus, unlike his other works on this same scene. Suffused with gentle light, his grey and wispy beard, and his deep sunken eyes just visible. Rembrandt died just a few days after having finished this work. The poet Victor Hugo wrote *'there is flame in the eyes of the young, but light in the eyes of the old'.*

This old man gives us words reported only in the gospel of Luke, surely captured most beautifully in the King James translation and sung at evensong every day in cathedrals. *'Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel'.* Having written such a strongly visual piece, it's no wonder that Luke became the patron saint of painter's guilds in the Middle Ages.

Simeon, guided by the Spirit, speaks just two sentences. He is not one to waste nor mince his words. His prophecy for Mary's soul, which a sword shall pierce, keeps us from easy sentimentality. Simeon is a symbol of the ancient Israel, watching and waiting for the coming Messiah. He knew all of the old prophecies. He embodies the long expectation of the nation. And with his ripening years, he gives us that precious gift of perspective, looking back to the crib and pointing us forward to the Cross – the whole shape of the Christian life.

Another elderly prophet, Anna, is seen over Simeon's shoulder. A woman whose whole life had been offered to God in prayer and worship in the Temple, goes on doing so at the sight of the Christ child. As the first disciples have been encouraged in our gospel reading these last two weeks, immediately she begins to tell others about Him.

Simeon helps us understand the whole story God is telling, the long view of salvation; holding together cradle and cross. Anna teaches us

how to live faithfully within it – waiting on God in prayer, in worship and telling others about Christ.

It's such a powerful and evocative scene in which Luke fulfils the words of the prophet Malachi – *'The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple'* – not in fire or judgement, but carried in the arms of a young mother, received by an old man who had waited his whole life to see him.

Luke is surely teaching us a lesson about the wisdom accrued by our elders; their experience, the life they've seen and lived, the wisdom they've garnered and can share. We've talked a lot, in the last few weeks, about the growing number of young people and families attending St Andrew's. It's also right that we should cherish and nurture those more advanced in years amongst us. Indeed, it was pointed out to me recently by a member of this church that several more elderly members of St Andrew's attend on a regular basis because of the welcome offered here to children. Perhaps they're grandparents. Perhaps they're not and don't have means to interact with younger people in the rest of their week. The thought occurred to me at young Oli's baptism, a couple of weeks ago; where else do you go every week with a shared spiritual purpose, where we gather with those aged 8 months to 80 years!

If we take the ageing process seriously as a Church, it should mean that we see in our 70, 80 and 90 year old members (one I dropped a birthday card through to last week – 99!) gifts and graces that we have not yet attained – gifts and graces which strengthen and uphold us all.

This story of the Presentation by Luke can be a story for those who feel more keenly that sense of ageing. It can be read as about our lives being simplified; about learning patience in new ways, and trusting in the over-arching purposes of God. It's about preparing ourselves for our own death; *'Lord, not lettest thou thy servant depart in peace'.* It's about the discovery, by the grace of God, of all that we still have to

learn. It’s learning that, as some of the powers we once thought we had wane, we are still and forevermore, held within the loving arms of God, just as God himself rested in the arms of Simeon. Amen.