

The best things come to those who wait. This phrase has always been famous, but it was made even more famous by television's Matt LeBlanc. Long before he played the lovable Joey on the TV Series *Friends*, LeBlanc was a commercial actor. In one commercial for Heinz Ketchup, we see a young LeBlanc unscrew a ketchup bottle. He sets the bottle on its side, and lays it on the edge of the rooftop of his New York City apartment, some twenty floors above street level. LeBlanc casually descends twenty flights of stairs, even sliding down a few banisters. He proceeds to order a hotdog from a street vendor outside of his building. The vendor says, "You want mustard on that or what?" LeBlanc takes his hotdog, places it behind his back, and angles the bun to catch the ketchup at the precise moment it begins dripping from the sky, blanketing the hotdog in the perfect stream of tomato-ey goodness. "Nah, I got it covered!!!" he says. The camera pans back to LeBlanc, collar popped on his bomber jacket. And the announcer says, "Heinz Ketchup, it's so rich, it's so thick, why waste time with anything else? Heinz, the best things come to those who wait."

I would argue that the best things don't come from just any kind of waiting. They come to those who wait with purpose. You've got to learn to see what you are waiting for, and once you've seen it, you've got to respond.

As a child my parents taught my brothers and me how to body surf in the Atlantic Ocean. We'd wade out past the break to the point where the water was up to our chest. And then we'd wait. We were waiting for suitable waves. And truth be told, they were kind of hard to spot. There, there, that one of the horizon...oooooh it looks like a good one. So big. And we'd wait a moment for it, and you know what, it would turn out to be puny. Nothin'!!! Just a little ripple. And on the other hand, little waves could be deceptive, too. They might look small on the horizon, but boy did they pack a punch when they came closer. You never knew when a good wave was gonna come along. So you had to be alert. But seeing the wave was only half the challenge. Once you saw a good wave, you had to be ready to paddle. Because you only had second or two to catch the ride. You'd move your little arms and little legs as fast as they could go, and if you did it just right, the wave would lift you up, and your body would soar across the ocean, skipping like a pebble on a lake....Wheeeeeeeeeee...until finally, the wave deposited you on the sandy shore to bask in the warm sunlight. Yes!!!!!! The best things

come to those who are alert and ready to respond –The best things come to those who wait with purpose!!!

Luke’s Gospel implores us to wait with purpose. Luke’s author lauds those characters who wait for God’s presence, who rightly identify it when they see it, and who respond to the joy God’s presence brings.

Today, we meet Simeon and Anna, a prophet and prophetess. Each are well into their eighties, and they’ve waited a long time. This pair represents the children of Israel, a nation who has waited more than a dozen generations for the Messiah – captivity first by the Babylonians, then by the Persians and Greeks, and now by the Romans sucks the life from this place. Hope is scarce, but it’s not absent. Simeon and Anna live with hope and faith. Simeon and Anna wait with purpose.

The Temple is their home. They pray. They fast. They live in God’s covenant. They keep alert. And the text doesn’t tell us this, but I’ll bet they do all the things to make God’s presence known in the temple. They greet people warmly, they remember names, they love God by loving others – they are evidence of God’s presence in the world. And because they love God with such vigor, such consistency, they are confident that God will bring about Israel’s consolation and restoration. In fact, Simeon has been so devout and so consistent, that God has promised Simeon will lay eyes on Israel’s consolation before he dies. A Messiah is coming!!! And so they wait, ready to welcome him, and prepared to respond with joy at his coming.

And then one day, he comes!!! Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple to be dedicated. The child is presented to Simeon, and instantly, Simeon is filled with the Holy Spirit and recognizes Jesus as Messiah.

Two important things happen here. Simeon is given the chance to reveal Jesus’ true identity: “Mary, Joseph, your child is the One we’ve waited for. This child will do marvelous things. This child is Israel’s salvation, but not just Israel’s. This child will be a revelation of light to all people.” Luke’s author, through Simeon, makes known that Jesus will bring redemption to all people.

And there's a second thing that happens. Simeon gets to offer a blessing to this family unit. He blesses Mary, Joseph, and the child. And he knows they'll need it, because the road ahead for them will be filled with both joy and pain.

Anna also, instantly recognizes Jesus. She offers great praises to God, and she immediately makes known Jesus' presence to all the people in the temple.

The story of Simeon and Anna is a fitting end to Luke's birth narrative. The section ends where it begins: The temple. Elizabeth and Zechariah, and Mary and Joseph have each committed to a prophet named John and a messiah named Jesus. Both are presented in the temple and both will be raised by faithful Jewish parents. The commitment of these two couples is affirmed by another couple: Simeon and Anna. For Luke's author, the fostering of Jesus' ministry will be made possible by all people working together: men, women, Jews and Gentiles, young and old, rich and poor, insiders and outsiders.

Anna and Simeon have waited with purpose for the Messiah. And when the joy of the Messiah is made known, they are ready to respond. Luke never tells us, but I feel pretty certain everything was business as usual the next day at the Temple. I bet Anna and Simeon were right back at their posts, waiting alertly for how God would act in the next minute, but also eager to tell all whom they encountered about the new baby they'd seen. A Messiah!!!

I think Anna and Simeon are also fitting characters to talk about as we begin our Christmas season.

This morning, we stand in the ocean of the Christmas season. The water is up to our chests. The Christmas wave that was once on the horizon is fast approaching. And we have a choice to make.

On the one hand, we can stand idly by, and just watch it ride on past us. After all, that Christmas effect is starting to wear off: The radio stations are back to playing regular old pop music; our blood to Chex Mix levels are starting to normalize; pretty soon people will be taking down their trees, and in a week or so, we'll all have to go back to work. And besides, the Christmas wave will come again next

**The Christmas Wave**  
**Bob Stillerman**  
**First Sunday After Christmas, 12/26/2021**  
**Luke 2:22-40**



a spiritually  
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year. We'll mark the calendar. We can be ready then!!! We'll even have a boogie board.

Or we can choose to believe that Christmas is not an event, but rather, a reality. We can choose to believe that the spirit of Christmas is present every day. We can open our eyes to the truth that a Messiah longs to be greeted. We can ride the wave of Christmas to that sandy shore and bask in the warm light of Christ. And with Anna and Simeon we can proclaim, "Israel, O Israel, Emmanuel has come!!!" Look out to the horizon, Sardis Baptist Church. Do you see it? Liberty to the captives, freedom for the oppressed, sight for the blind. It's here. Are you ready to see it?