In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I love this morning’s Psalm — Psalm 148, with its happy call upon all creation to praise the Lord. Especially at Christmas time, it seems exactly right to me that our world should praise the Lord — every bit of our world should join the song. It is as if the Psalmist gazes with wonder at the Babe of Bethlehem, and breaks forth in a call to all the world to praise our Maker for the birth of our Savior. Naturally, the Psalm calls upon the high beings to lend their voices to the praise — angels and stars, they should praise the Lord. And so read:

2Praise him, all you angels of his;* praise him, all his host.
3Praise him, sun and moon;* praise him, all you shining stars. (Psalm 148:2-3, LBW)

But the Psalm does not neglect the lower beings, like the whales and wind, but calls upon them too to praise the Lord:

7Praise the LORD | from the earth,* you sea monsters | and all deeps;
8fire and hail, | snow and fog,* tempestuous wind, doing | his will;

We have just sung a fun hymn in our Lutheran Book of Worship that carries on in this good manner, calling upon even the test tubes in the lab to join the praise of our Creator. And so we have this verse in the hymn “Earth and All Stars”:

Classrooms and labs!
Loud boiling test tubes!
Sing to the Lord a new song!
Athlete and band!
Loud cheering people!
Sing to the Lord a new song.

Why?

He has done marvelous things,
I too will praise him with a new song. (LBW 558)

Well, in this morning’s Gospel story, we have two elderly saints who join the angels and whales and the tempestuous winds in praise of Almighty God. They lead us, and I want us to join them in our own generation. I am speaking of Simeon and Anna. Simeon is the one who is content to take his leave of this world now that he has seen the Christ Child. This world will be okay, Simeon knows, now that the Saviour has come. And so he sings his Nunc Dimittis:

\begin{quote}
\text{29} \text{Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;}
\text{30} \text{for mine eyes have seen thy salvation (Luke 2:29-30, RSV)}
\end{quote}

So, that is Simeon.

And then we have old Anna. She joins Simeon in thanksgiving at the Christ Child. The picture we get is that Simeon has taken baby Jesus up into his arms and blessed God with his Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:28). And then Anna comes on the scene and joins in the thanksgiving:

\begin{quote}
\text{38} \text{And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38, RSV)}
\end{quote}

Two elderly folks. I like ‘em both. But this morning, let me focus on Anna. I think I have been privileged to know people like her. Indeed, I hope that you and I become more and more like her as we get older.

One of the commentaries I read on this morning’s text was by the dear old Scottish clergyman William Barclay (1907-1978)\(^1\). Barclay has only a few paragraphs on Anna, and they are interesting, but what I most like is his heading for his discussion. It reads this way: “A Lovely Old Age.”\(^2\) That is Anna. She has lived to a lovely old age.

She is eighty-four. Nowadays, that is still getting up there, but back in Bible times, that was really quite old. Here are the things I would like to lift up about Anna. They are attainable for us too: First, she was a worshiper. She came to church a lot! Some people are like that. If the doors are open here at Immanuel for worship, then some dear souls are almost always here. And if they are not, they often let me know that they are out of town or something,
so that I will not worry. Anna was such a one. Our text says this about her life of worship:

She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. (Luke 2:37, RSV)

So, that is the first thing I notice about Anna: she worshiped a lot. Some people think of God from time to time. But Anna seems to have been one who stood in continual wonder and gratitude for her Maker and Redeemer. Her desire to worship God seems to have been inexhaustible. She did not become preoccupied with other matters, but continued to think of her God and to worship him. Night and day, the Bible says. She worshiped often. We can do that too. We have a new year ahead of us. It can be year in which we hasten here to church even more often.

The second thing I notice about Anna is that she prayed a lot. Our texts says that she worshiped with fasting and prayer:

She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. (Luke 2:37, RSV)

This meant that Anna was bold to address herself to Almighty God. She was a person of prayer.

At first we might think this a natural thing, that someone should be a person of prayer. But when we stop to think about Who it is we are addressing when we pray, it might well dawn on us that it takes some boldness to pray. True prayer is in fact addressed to Someone much greater, and truer, and more majestic than any president or king, philosopher, saint, or composer of music. True prayer is addressed to God the Father, “creator of heaven and earth.”

Jesus knew that it is an incredible thing to address our Maker and so he took time to encourage us to do so. He urges us to talk to the Maker of heaven and earth as a child speaks to his or her parent. And so Jesus says:

9Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? 10Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:9-11, KJV)

So ask! This is what Anna did. She made bold to bring her concerns to her God. She told him of her hopes, her fears, her needs, her petitions for Israel.
She was a person of prayer. This is attainable for us too. We can pray even more this coming year.

So, I have noted that Anna worshiped a lot and she prayed a lot. But it is my third note that especially interests me. My third note is that Anna was a “prophet.” Our text introduces her this way:

36And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; (Luke 2:36, RSV)

Now, in the Bible’s way of speaking, when a person is a false prophet, the Bible says so. But there is no suggestion of falseness when it comes to Anna. She seems to have been a true prophet: she was someone who did not speak simply about God, for also for him. When folks listened to Anna, they were listening to one who expressed the mind of our Maker. She spoke the Lord’s word to people. She spoke the truth of things. She was a prophet.

With some folks, if you go to them for advice, they will tell you what the newspapers say. Or what the neighbors say. Or what science says. Or what Nietzsche says. But when folks went to Anna, she told them what the Lord says.

This third trait follows on after the first two. Anna worshiped a lot and prayed a lot. It was natural, then, that when people came to her for advice, she spoke of what was on her heart. She spoke of the Lord. You could count on her for spiritual conversation. You could trust her to speak of the divine dimension of things. If you wanted to know about fashion, about stylish clothing, about financial investments, well you could go to other people. But if you want to know about life and eternity, about what is good and true and lovely, then you go to Anna. She might not have high credentials in terms of academic degrees, but she was a wise one nonetheless. If the topic was an important one, then you could go to Anna, because she was a prophet. She was one who told you God’s view of things.

This too is attainable to us. And this is my great theme going into our new year. You too can speak up for God. You do not need to be ordained to the Holy Ministry. You do not need a Master of Divinity degree. You do not need robes or a special location for your work. You can simply be one who when the time seems right, you will speak up for how our God wants things to go. You can speak of love. You can speak of hope in this world. You can speak of Jesus. Aye, you can speak of that One Simeon holds in his hands and about whom he sings his Nunc Dimittis. You can speak of that One Anna beholds and is led to give thanks to God and to speak of redemption. You can speak of that One to whom you belong by Baptism and of that One who will not let you down, nor let anyone down who would come to him, even Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.