

Simeon and Anna

There's something endearing about the story of Simeon and Anna not just for the Advent-Christmas time when this article began to take shape but for any time of the year. The Syriac poet Ephrem has devoted a whole bunch of poems related to them which reveal how these two charming characters comport themselves. While here isn't the place to expound upon these poems, they may be found in a Syriac-Latin text prepared by Thomas Joseph Lamy entitled **Hymni et Sermones** (1886). Obviously they are well worth examining whether you can read Syriac and/or Latin.

Actually having struggled through the above mentioned poems on several times had provided the impetus to present this modest set of notations on the Gospel text by St. Luke. The format follows the so-called "expansion format" applied to biblical books on this homepage. That is to say, the goal isn't to provide information, historical or otherwise, but to expand upon what Luke has to present concerning the beloved figures of Simeon and Anna. This, of course, is done in the spirit of *lectio divina*.

All in all a homey, domestic picture emerges...one not tinged by the need to reform ourselves, suffer and the like which is all too familiar. Plenty of that is in the Gospels and Epistles. We could say that the story of both persons take place before these elements emerge in the Gospels which deal with Jesus' salvific mission. While that's obvious vital, to lose sight of people like Simeon and Anna is to lose sight of something very precious. Three other persons might be added who don't have anything to do with all this seriousness but where emphasis is on friendship pure and simple, Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Certainly Mary and Joseph are preeminent among them all.

The method of examining the text consists of going through it line by line, word by word, expanding on it as deemed appropriate. Again, the guiding principle is to use these reflections for the practice of *lectio divina*. Even when putting down these reflections, it was necessary to pause quite often for no other reason than to let the text sink in or in a word, to savor it thoroughly.

One point to keep in mind...frequent reference is made to the conjunctive *kai*, often translated as "and." Reason? It acts as a connection between what had just happened and the action at hand. In other words, *kai* serves to connect the text

and string it along as a complete unit, something you don't appreciate unless in the original Greek.

Luke 2.22-38

Vs. 22: And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

This passage begins with the conjunctive *kai* (and) which shows the close connection between the present action and what had taken place before it. In this case it's the circumcision of Jesus and the giving of his name including purification or *katddharismos* of his parents (i.e., 'their'). The passage pertaining to this is from Leviticus (13.3-6)...rather long...but given here in the spirit of reading the text as *lectio divina*: "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying; she shall not touch any hallowed thing nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purifying are completed. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks as in her menstruation; and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days. And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the door of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering."

As for "time," the Greek has "days" along with the verb *pleroo*, to fulfill in the sense of come to a completion which here is the period of forty days after Jesus' birth. *Nomos* is the noun for *Torah* which also can apply more broadly to custom as well as ordinance. Note that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus literally "into (*eis*) Jerusalem" with the intent of presenting him to the Lord, *paristemi*. This verb consists of the root *histemi* (to stand) prefaced with the preposition *para* or beside, here with respect to the Lord.

Vs. 23: (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord')

The **RSV** has this verse in parentheses which continues from the previous one and goes on through vs. 24. However, the Greek text lacks such parentheses. Regardless, the small but important word *kathos* or "as" is indicative of

explaining the context of the Leviticus quote. It brings into the present situation that which is written (*gegraptai*) in the *Torah* of the Lord. That is to say, all Jewish observance is referred to the *Torah* or *gegraptai* because it was handed down to Moses on Mount Sinai by the Lord himself. “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord” [Ex 24.4]. So when we hear *gegraptai* not only here but elsewhere, we know that a divine inscribing is behind it all. Furthermore, the passive-ness of the verb lends greater authority. Without mentioning its source, automatically people know it comes from God, simple as that. Note that this is the second mention of law, *nomos/Torah*.

Once this *kathos* (as) is set firmly in one’s mind, that which is *gegraptai* can be read correctly such as we have in the present context. By this is meant a quote from Ex 13.2 (also refer to vss. 12 and 15) which is prefaced by vs. 1: “The Lord said to Moses.” That is to say, he *davar* or expressed himself as such-and-such. As for the verse at hand, it reads in full as “Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” *Qadash* is the verb to consecrate, fundamentally as to set apart as well as to prepare. Note that such *qadash* applies to *kal* or “all” which means man and beast. Also note the three uses of the preposition *b-* or “in:” in the sons, in man and in beast. As for opening the womb, the Greek *dianoigo* (the preposition *dia-* or through) and the Hebrew has the noun *peter* or the opening.

Vs. 24: and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons."

The conclusion of an extended sentence begun with vs. 22 with the conjunctive “and” showing the close connection with the Exodus quote. Instead of *gegraptai* (‘it is written’) we have *to eiremenon* (‘what is said’) which implies a more direct communication from the Lord, that is, through his *davar* or word-as-expression (cf. last verse). Here *to eiremenon* is with respect to literally “in (*en*) the law or “*Torah* of the Lord” whereas *gegraptai* of vs. 23 has “according (*kata*) to the law or *Torah* of the Lord.” I.e., note the distinction between “in” and “according to.”

The verse referred to here is Lev 12.8 which pertains to the purification of a woman after childbirth: “And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtle-doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” The two types of birds are considerably cheaper than a lamb which

reflects upon the financial situation of both Joseph and Mary.

We have two types of offerings: *holah* and *chata'th*, the former in the literal sense of going up (as smoke) and the latter also meaning sin in and by itself. Also included is making atonement presumably in the temple, *kaphar* fundamentally as to cover, this ritual gesture making the woman clean. Implied is that by reason of childbirth a woman has sinned. More importantly, however, is that the purification took place forty days after having given birth, for example, forty symbolic of Israel in the Sinai wilderness, that being a kind of purification.

Vs. 25: Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

The conjunctive *kai* translated as “now” is along with *idou* which goes untranslated and generally is rendered as “behold” or something similar to get one’s attention. Here it serves to shift attention away from the purification just effected to Simeon who may or may not have been the officiating priest. I.e., we don’t know. The way *kai* and *idou* work together is enabling us to come upon Simeon almost by chance, this being enhanced by him being “in Jerusalem.” This can suggest that he wasn’t a resident there and may have been in the capitol on business, religious or otherwise.

Note the parallel between Joseph and Simeon, the former being described in Mt 1.19: “and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame” (etc.). In other words, both are portrayed as *dikaios* or righteous, just. Most likely Joseph was considerably younger. As for Simeon, there’s added *eulabes* or devout or literally, taking hold (*lambano*) well (*eu-*) and thus suggestive of undertaking a task prudently. “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” [Acts 2.5].

Such *eulabes* in Simeon (certainly the same can apply to Joseph) is active in that he waiting for Israel’s consolation, *prosdechomai*, the preposition *pros-* indication of direction towards-which prefaced to the root which means to receive, to take or to accept. Here it is with regard to *paraklesis*, a calling to one’s aide or a summons, the preposition *para-* indicative of being beside. Such *paraklesis* is associated with the coming Messiah who is present now with Simeon.

The Holy Spirit (*Pneuma*) enabled Simeon to recognize Jesus as Messiah because it was *epi*...upon...him, as it were, looking down just from above and guiding him until this very moment of recognition.

Vs. 26: And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

The conjunctive *kai* ('and') is important here because it connects the *paraklesis* of Simeon which had extended throughout his entire lifetime until the present. The verse at hand intimates that the upon-ness of the Holy Spirit with respect to Simeon had been present longer than at first we might imagine. As for the revelation, we don't have the expected *apokalupto*. Instead, it's the verb *chrematizo* fundamentally as to transact business, to give a response as well as to receive a warning. I.e., the verb is more active by nature and seems to have been imparted to Simeon at an indefinite time in his life, perhaps from birth. Such an impartation must have delighted him to no end, knowing that he would live until seeing the Christ of the Lord. That means he was ever attentive for a long time, throughout his life.

Given the parallel between Simeon and Joseph (both being *dikaios*, cf. vs. 25), most likely a similar *chrematizo* happened to the latter.

Vs. 27: And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law,

Essentially this verb is an extended sentence running through vs. 32 or through the so-called *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon. The conjunctive *kai*, as noted elsewhere, shows the fast-paced action at hand as well as the connection between events.

Although the previous verse intimates that the Holy Spirit had been *epi* ('upon') Simeon for an indefinite period of time, here we have it springing into action. That is to say, the Spirit inspires him which is rendered literally as "he came in the Spirit into the temple." Note the transition between *en* to *eis*, in to into, the first being an invisible presence followed immediately by a physical structure, a house of worship.

The more precise *en* -> *eis* is with respect to Mary and Joseph bringing their child, literally “in into the leading or *en* with *eisago* or another *en* -> *eis*, if you will. There Simeon is “to do for him according to the *Torah*” which isn’t spelled out but a ceremony different from the circumcision having taken place eight days after Jesus’ birth (cf. vs. 21). The perfect passive participle of the verb *ethizo* is used, to do according to custom, which here is linked with *nomos* or law (i.e., *Torah*).

Vs. 28: he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

The preposition *eis* or “into” is used with regard to Simeon’s arms implying a kind of bear-hug gesture. This reflects the fact that at last he is able to see the Lord’s Christ as vs. 26 puts it. However, it’s tinged by the fact that once Simeon has seen him, his death is not far off, so he had better make the most of this situation along with Mary and Joseph being present.

Simeon then blesses Jesus, *eulogeo*, literally to speak well (*eu-*) which is both prefaced and followed by the conjunctive *kai*, “and.” The second leads into what’s known as the *Nunc Dimittis* which forms part of the Divine Office of Compline at the end of the day. As for this *eulogeo*, there’s no record of it. We get the impression that for Simeon it was secondary in light of the *Nunc Dimittis* which is to follow.

Vs. 29: "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word;

The very first words out of Simeon’s words reflect fulfilment of his life-long quest as noted above. At once they dispel any notion we may have that Simeon dreaded the event, signaling as it does that soon death will be upon him. The word *nun* or “now” is indicative of his desire to go and be with the Lord as soon as possible. As for that actual departure, we have no record.

Note the way Simeon states his request, *apoluo* or literally to dissolve or loosen from (*apo-*). It takes place with the framework of him being a *doulos* and the Lord a *despotes*, servant or better, slave, and master of the house. Such loosening-from is to be effected following the Greek order: “according to your word” which is followed by “in peace.” There’s an interaction between the two prepositions: first *kata* or according to a given plan followed by *en* or presence within. The first involves *eirene* or peace and the second, presence-in the divine

rhema which means spoken word or utterance. As for this *rhema*, it hearkens back to the *chrematizo* of vs. 26, that verb as noted referring to an interaction.

Vs. 30: for my eyes have seen your salvation

This is the shortest verse in the except at hand yet sums it all up. After an entire lifetime filled with expectation Simeon has seen divine salvation or *soterion*, bringing to safety or deliverance. Implied, of course, is that Simeon had an intimation of this *soterion*, that it isn't foreign to him, and he would recognize it at once. *is seeing* means that not long afterwards his fellow Israelites will have the same opportunity.

Vs. 31: which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

Simeon acknowledges that the Lord has prepared the *soterion* of vs. 30, *hetoimazo* also as to get ready. The significance here is that it doesn't apply just to Israel but all peoples. The text pretty much identifies Simeon and the rest of the human race present at this event in terms of the preposition *kata prosopon*, literally "according to the countenance." Obviously at this stage only a tiny handful are aware of what is transpiring. However, at the threshold of death, Simeon has a clarity of insight others don't have which may include Joseph and Mary.

Vs. 32: a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to thy people Israel.

The preparation of divine salvation in the very eyes of all peoples is a kind of light (*phos*) of revelation. *Apokalupsis* is the noun which means an uncovering or the laying bear of a reality already present but not known. Note that the preposition *eis* is used, literally as "into uncovering."

Such uncovering is for the benefit of two groups of people, Gentiles and Israel. The latter has glory (*doxa*) attributed to it, not the Gentiles or *laos*, common noun for people. Although having *doxa* is a divine privilege, ultimately it is secondary to *apokalupsis*, for one can get caught up with this privilege which then prevents the ability to appreciate what has been uncovered.

And so concludes the *Nunc Dimittis*.

Vs. 33: And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him;

This verse is a lengthy sentence extending through vs. 35 and begins with the conjunctive *kai*, another instance of the close connection between what had just taken place (i.e., the *Nunc Dimittis*) and the response by Joseph and Mary. Both marveled, *thaumazo* also as to wonder with regard Simeon's words concerning their son. In other words, at this point Simeon had greater knowledge of Jesus' future than his parents and must have wondered where he obtained such knowledge. You'd think that all three—actually four, Anna who is about to be introduced—got together afterwards and talked about all this. However, that's not the way prophecy works. The person or persons involved must figure it out on their own.

Vs. 34: and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against

The conjunctive *kai* shows how closely related is the response by Jesus' parents to what Simeon had said and what he continues to say. This is the second instance of *eulogeo*, the first being in vs. 28 when Simeon does it with regard to God. Next he speaks with (*pros*, indicative of towards-which) Mary, not Joseph. You'd think that the father would be the primary recipient of any message from the Lord but such is not the case.

Simeon introduces his words with a bit of flair. That is to say, he uses the expression *idou* ('behold') which adds to their importance. The verb *keitai* as "set" implies that Jesus had been preordained before his birth. Such setting, if you will, takes place when the child grows up to be an adult. At that time he will effect the rise and fall of many people, *ptosis* and *anastasis*. The former implies a calamity whereas the later a rising, this the same word as applied to resurrection. Both are prefaced with the preposition *eis*, literally as "into the fall and rising" as applicable to Israelites; Gentiles aren't mentioned here.

This verse contains a second conjunctive joining the *ptosis* and *anastasis* with *semeion* or sign, also prefaced with the preposition *eis* ('into'), here in the sense of an omen. Note that it is spoken against or *antilego*, vs. 34 breaking off and carrying into the next verse.

Vs. 35: (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

This verse begins with words in parentheses as well as *kai*, they being added as a kind of verbal footnote from Simeon to Mary. *Rhomphaia* is a large, broad sword most likely requiring two hands to wield. Such a formidable weapon will pierce Mary's heart or *psuche*, also the common noun for soul, the verb being *dierchomai*, to go through (*dia-*). It seems that this *rhomphaia* not only will go through Mary's heart...soul...but will shatter it utterly. Once done, thoughts of many people will be revealed, this possibly including Gentiles.

Dialogismos is suggestive of deliberating within oneself. In other words, it conveys a negative sense or thoughts with regard to Jesus Christ as will be evident once he begins his ministry. While *dialogismos* takes place out of sight and is private, nevertheless it will become uncovered, *apokalupto*. And so the *rhomphaia* will be that agent responsible for such *apokalupto* of what is within Mary's *psuche*.

Vs. 36: And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanu-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity,

The conjunctive *kai* serves to make a transition from Simeon and Mary over to Anna, a prophetess (*prophetes*). Nothing is said of her past except this vocation which is in line with women such as Miriam and Deborah. She belongs to the tribe of Asher which doesn't say much. Since Simeon was associated with the temple and Anna had remained in it for many years as the next verse says, most likely the two knew each other. Often they must have shared their respective divine inspirations and collaborated, if you will, to bring about what's recounted in these verses. So here we have two elderly persons associated with the temple and well known by the people as well as priests and other attendants in service there.

Vs. 37: and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

Another instance of the conjunctive *kai* to express swift movement within the account at hand. Apparently at the ripe old age of eight-four and after her

husband's death Anna associated herself with the Jerusalem temple. Chances are she had children who must have marveled at this, especially because as vs. 36 states clearly, their mother was a prophetess and held in high regard. As for any prophesying, we have no information, but she didn't get this designation for doing nothing. Perhaps out of respect for her office and personal holiness, officials at the temple allowed her to take up residence in or around the temple. The verse at hand is clear that Anna never left the premises which means she had intimate knowledge of all the proceedings that took place there. She may even have engaged in some prophesying, dropping hints here and there as to the birth of Jesus Christ, these being shared with Simeon.

While in the temple, Anna practiced a kind of monastic observance, that is, worship with fasting and prayer. Note that her constant presence is reinforced by the phrase "day and night," a way of expressing continuous activity.

Vs. 38: 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.

This last verse of the document at hand begins with the conjunctive *kai* which serves to bring the Simeon and Anna saga to completion. Anna approaches Simeon, Jesus, Mary and Joseph at a precise time, most likely when such rites were performed. Actually there could have been several just before as well as other parents in waiting.

By reason of spending her waking hours in the temple and familiar with what went on within it, she knew something was different with this rite that she had seen performed frequently. I.e., by reason of being a prophetess, she sensed something special was transpiring.

Anna must have made somewhat of a scene, familiar to many in the temple, of thanking God. The verb is *anthomologeomai* whose root means to acknowledge and is prefaced with the preposition whose form is *anti* or in the place of, for the sake of and has the verb convey the sense of making a mutual agreement and to confess it openly.

Anna speaks to any and all in the temple looking for Jerusalem's redemption, *prosdechomai* as in vs. 25 (accent on *pros-*, direction toward-which) with regard to *lutrosis*, fundamentally as payment for sin. Note that it refers to Jerusalem,

Israel's capitol, but implies the entire nation. Most likely the sense of expectation can imply freedom from Roman occupation; true, but surely Anna as prophetess has something greater in mind. Not only did she speak freely with those in the temple (for many knew her already) but to those parents bringing their children for a blessing just like Mary and Joseph. Nothing, however, is said of how she was received.

We can assume that both she and Simeon passed away shortly afterwards, having fulfilled their respective missions. Mary and Joseph were informed and missed them dearly. So from this point onward they enter a thirty year long silence or until Jesus begins his ministry. In that period memory of Anna and Simeon as to Israel's redemption obviously faded away though the desire for it remained. We can assume that when Jesus got old enough, his parents informed him of the mysterious words spoken on his behalf, this contributing over the years to an awakening of his mission. Thus by the time Jesus was a man, both were simply a distant memory.

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