

Anna reflects

I didn't miss Simeon for a few days: I'd been to Hebron, helping my great-niece Sarah with her fourth baby (another daughter – Reuben is getting desperate for a son) and when I got back I was that worn out, and then I had to go round and catch up with my 'shut-ins' who never get to see a friendly face if I don't drop in, so it wasn't until Tuesday – no, Wednesday – when I was talking to Dorcas in our usual corner of the Court of the Women that she told me she hadn't seen Simeon in the temple for the last week, and that Benjamin had said that he'd had a stroke.

Well, of course, I went straight round to his room in Shoemaker Street to see how he was. Thankfully, it wasn't a stroke, though it had been a nasty heart attack which had left him very weak. The young couple who had brought him home had got some shopping in, and had left word with Daniel and Ruth in the flat downstairs before they had to set off back to Galilee – but then of course, Ruth is caring for her mother out in Bethany and is run off her feet by the children, so there wasn't very much she could do for Simeon.

As soon as he saw me, Simeon got very excited and tried to get out of bed. He grabbed my hand: 'Thank God you've come,' he said 'I saw him, I saw his eyes. It was him, I know it was!' Saw who? I knew whom we would have meant if we'd been talking hopefully about the Messiah in the temple, but surely he didn't mean that? But Simeon was shaking and coughing and getting more and more agitated. 'Calm down,' I said, and poured him a drink of water.

After a while, he recovered himself and began to tell me his story: how this young couple, Miriam and Joseph, had come to the temple to offer the sacrifice for their first-born, Jeshua, and then asked Simeon to bless the child – I'd seen him do it so often in the past! 'But then,' Simeon went on, 'as I looked down at the child, and saw him looking up at me, I suddenly knew that *this* was the Messiah we have been looking for for so long, and more than that, that I was looking into the eyes of God himself!' Could it really be so? We'd waited and hoped so long, that it seemed incredible that our hopes should finally be fulfilled – and in this way: not a great angel coming down from heaven, but as a little baby only recognised by one old man. But as Simeon talked, I recognised that this was no demented rambling, but God visiting his faithful, patient servant. I rejoiced for him, and for myself, and for all the faithful watchers and waiters when they came to hear the news.

But meanwhile, what was I to do for Simeon? He was very weak, and relaxed now that he had told me his story. He was ready to go, and who would wish to hold him back from sharing permanently in that life which he had seen for a moment in a baby's eyes? And that indeed was what happened: I stayed with him for a couple of days, doing what I could, but he slept most of the time, and on the third morning he just slipped away. His nephew turned up and arranged the funeral, and I left him to whatever inheritance Simeon had left – not much, I think.

But how was I going to tell people about Simeon's vision? My first thought was to rush into the temple and tell everyone – perhaps even try to speak to the High Priest about it. But then I paused: this was still in the reign of King Herod, and there were nasty rumours circulating about how he had ordered a massacre of children in Bethlehem. And in any case, who would believe a garrulous old woman like me? And where was the proof? Where was this child? Safe up in Galilee, and perhaps that was where God planned to keep him safe.

But the faithful people, the ones like Simeon and myself, they should know, and be reassured that their hopes would be fulfilled. And so we spread the news among the old people, the ones who the people in power never think about, and certainly never listen to. Perhaps it will always be us old ones who keep hope alive and who pass the story on: we have our secret and we know that, though it may not come in our lifetime, God's coming to his people, whoever they may be, is sure, and our hopes will be fulfilled, here and in heaven.