

GOSPEL BOOKENDS

One of the reasons I love Luke's account of the early life of Jesus is because of the bookends.

Years ago Simon and Garfunkel wrote a song which had this title, and it celebrates the lifelong friendship of two old men who now pass their time gazing out at the world from the park bench where they would meet every day. It seems as if their best days are gone and all they have left are the memories of their younger years.

As our years flash by at an ever increasing rate of knots we are sometimes left feeling as if our best times are now firmly in the past, but Luke's account of the Nativity would have us think again.

His story begins with Zechariah (Luke 1 v5-24) where an old bookend is on duty in the temple! His life seems full of regret for he and his wife Elizabeth have been hitherto unable to have any children, but now an Angel of the Lord appears to him to let him know that all this is about to change. They are about to be parents to none other than John The Baptist and old Zechariah cannot believe it - " How can this be " he cries "for I am an old man and my wife is well on in years."

Luke's story of the birth of Jesus draws to an end with today's account of the presentation of Christ in the temple. (Luke 2 v 22-40) Two old bookends see it all. One of them, Simeon, gathers Jesus in his arms and blesses Him and Mary and Joseph too, whilst an old prophetess Anna, gives praise to God for all she has been privileged to witness.

Both these two are living in a world of patient hope where suffering has become a way of life. They see here that God's appointed redeemer will deal with this suffering by sharing it himself and their realisation of this brings a deeper element to their praise.

The parts played by these bookends to the Christmas story is deeply significant as they remind us that just when we think our best years are passed, God steps in to give us a pivotal role in making his purposes known.

I wonder what part of your life has been significant for your part in beginnings and endings - when you have been the bookend to an unfolding story that would not have been the same without you, and I wonder where such opportunities lurk for us today, especially when we feel our best years are long gone

With love
Fr Andrew