

A few years ago the National Trust came up with an idea for Children – 50 things to do before you're 11 ¾ - it was a way to get children out more, become more adventurous. 15 was to play in the snow!

It's a form of bucket list – do you know where the term came from? It's from 'kick the bucket' – itself an odd phrase, possibly dating back to the days of public hanging, where kicking the bucket away from underneath the criminal started the process - in other words to die – so it's list of things to do before you die!

Do you have a Bucket List, a full Bucket List? You know, a list of things you want to do before you "kick the bucket?" On mine is to get back to doing some proper photography, take up the trumpet again – maybe getting back to a decent weight, see the northern lights – as many of you know, I've got a sabbatical coming up, and the pilgrimage Helen and I have got planned certainly features highly.

Sure, Bucket lists are a slightly crude way of looking at our inevitable demise, but it does call us to focus on living and not dying. In our Gospel reading - Simeon had a Bucket List, a very unusual Bucket List. We're told that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Lord's Messiah before he died. So, it was just that one thing on Simeon's Bucket List? No trip to Hawaii or climb up Kilimanjaro; no French dinner in Paris at midnight or to see the northern lights. Just one thing — see the Lord's Messiah? But then again, that's a pretty big "one thing."

And, as it turns out, it was even bigger than Simeon thought. We're told that Simeon was looking forward to the "consolation of Israel." In other words, he was looking forward to the salvation of God's people, Israel. But look at what happens. The Holy Spirit reveals to Simeon (we're not told how) that he would see the Lord's Messiah before he died. Maybe it was during a time of quiet reflective prayer, or in reading the scriptures, ways God still speak today.

Every day Simeon would look for a child born the Messiah. Every day, as parents brought their children to the Temple for the rites of purification, Simeon would look to see if maybe this one was the Christ. When Mary and Joseph appeared in the Temple with Jesus, Simeon knew, he just knew, this was the one! He took the child in his arms and that's when something happened that no one anticipated, not even Simeon. He poured out his heart in praise to God in the song we know as the *nunc dimittis* (Stanford G)?

Simeon gazed into the baby Jesus' eyes and declared that this child was not only Israel's salvation, but the salvation of the Gentiles as well! We don't quite catch the magnitude of this statement because we've been brought up in the Christian tradition that believes Jesus Christ came for the salvation of all people, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him." (John. 3:16-17) To say the Messiah, the Christ, had come for the salvation of Israel was one thing, but to say the Messiah, the Christ, had come for all people — well that was something else, that was something radically new!

Don't forget we're back in Luke's gospel - Luke, our gospel writer, was a Gentile writing his Gospel to Gentiles. Do you remember how Luke's gospel begins? Luke states that he is writing to the "most excellent Theophilus," "that you might know the certainty concerning the things in which you were instructed." (Luke. 1:3-4) Luke wrote his Gospel to a Gentile audience through a high ranking official named Theophilus. Incidentally, we don't know who Theophilus was, but we do know his name meant "friend of God." So to hear early on in Luke's gospel that the salvation Jesus brings is for all people is really quite striking. It really is Good News! It was good news for Simeon, and it's good news for us too.

Last week we were in Southampton for Ben's dedication – Nicola and James took Ben along to their church to give thanks for him, and to dedicate themselves to help Ben grow close to God. Mary and Joseph did the same. Their obedience to the Jewish law was transformed by Simeon (and Anna) as they met their saviour in the form of a 40 day old baby.

Simeon's bucket list was fulfilled beyond even his imagination. God revealed to him the striking good news that Jesus came as his saviour. Is Jesus on our bucket list – to know him better, to recognise him as our saviour?