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**Anna & Simeon**  
**the first Christian evangelist**  
**based on Luke 2:25-40**  
**by Ralph Milton**  
**from [Is This Your Idea of a Good Time, God?](#)**  
Wood Lake Books

*Anna is one of those fascinating shadows that flits across the screen. We catch a glimpse and she is gone. All we know is what is told us in three short verses of Luke.*

*Anna had been married for seven years, then widowed, and since that time she served full-time at the temple, praying and fasting. And when she saw the child Jesus, she immediately began to tell everyone who would listen that the Messiah, the "consolation of Israel" had arrived.*

*So Anna was the first Christian evangelist. She was the first one to proclaim the good news of the Messiah. The only other possible contenders for this title of first evangelist were the lowly shepherds who visited the stable, but the text says they went home glorifying and praising God. That's celebration but not evangelism.*

*Anna went out and spread the word to the folks around the temple. The first Christian preacher.*

Her legs were bowed with childhood rickets and with eighty-four years of life.

"I walk like an old goose," she would cackle, "but in my mind, eh, in my mind I still soar like an eagle."

Sometimes Anna counted her years by the people she had survived. Five children she had born, and outlived every one of them. She'd been the midwife who brought the High Priest of the temple into the world and now acted as his unofficial "mother emeritus."

"Very unofficial," Anna grins. "His Highness doesn't want it known that I blew his nose and wiped his bum when he was a tadpole. But he comes and talks to me when nobody's looking. It wouldn't do for him to be seen talking to a woman now, would it?"

Anna had moved into the temple, expecting to die there soon. But death didn't come. Instead she had a new kind of life, a life of caring and counseling and friendship to

the many people who came into the temple each day. Her body grew smaller, her legs bowed a little more, but her eyes grew bright and gentle with wisdom and good humor.

Anna's special concern was for young families. Jewish custom required a first-born son to be brought to the temple and dedicated to God.

"Those parents—they're just children really—they're so frightened, so anxious. We've got lots of priests around here, but they're so busy being important, they don't have time for young families. So I just show them around and help them get things done."

Anna's special concern was for poor families, intimidated by the wealth and power of the temple, afraid of being cheated by the money changers—as they often were. Anna got them through. That was her mission. Getting them through a tough time.

But Anna had a secret dream. She hadn't shared it with anyone except her old friend Simeon. Anna and Simeon, like Jews everywhere, had been raised with the hope that someday God would send a Messiah, a chosen one, someone who would bring in a new era of love and justice.

"Do you suppose we might see God's chosen one?" old Simeon would ask. "Do you suppose it's possible?"

"I live in hope, Simeon. I live in hope."

"But how will we know, Anna? How will we know?"

"We'll know, Simeon," Anna said, then wondered why she felt so confident.

It was getting late in the day. Anna's bowed legs were tired. She'd been active all day in the temple, in her ministry of simply being there for anyone who needed her. Then she saw a frail, teenage girl carrying a baby. Beside her a man, slightly older. Anna walked over as quickly as her goose-like gait could carry her.

"Welcome to the temple, my children." She could see they were hot and tired from their long walk. "Come over here into the shade of the wall. You can rest for a moment. May I see your baby?"

It wasn't that the baby looked different than all the other babies brought into the temple. There was nothing unusual about the mother who held it. But there was something very different happening inside Anna, an exquisite ache, a sense of powerful weakness.

"Simeon!" The name was whispered, but with such intensity, the old man who was dozing nearby woke with a start. He hurried over to Anna.

Simeon looked at the child. He saw nothing unusual. But then he looked into the fire-bright eyes of his old friend.

"Anna? Do you suppose?" Her eyes answered his question.

Simeon began to sing. An ancient song, half remembered, half made up, a song of hope and thanksgiving, a song of pain and rejoicing. Anna, who had no voice at that moment, sang along in her heart.

*Dear God,  
now I can die in peace,  
as you promised.  
I have seen your salvation  
a gift to all people...  
a light for the Gentiles  
and glory for your people, Israel.*

If Anna's bowed legs would have allowed it, she would have been dancing. Around the temple she ran telling anyone who would listen. "I have seen the Messiah. That baby that was just here? That's God's chosen one."

Most of the people ignored her. Especially the priests. "She's finally lost it," one of them muttered.

Late that night, Anna wept long and quietly. She grieved and celebrated all that was, and all that was yet to be. And then she slept.

It was only a few days later that Anna was midwife at another kind of birth. Her old friend Simeon was dying, and she was at his side, holding his hand and helping him through it, as she had helped so many others through life's changes.

"I think I can die now, Anna. I'll know very soon whether that child really is the Messiah, the chosen one. I'll know very soon." Simeon closed his eyes for the last time.

"But I know already, my old friend," she whispered. "Sleep well."

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,  
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