

On your marks

On 2 February each year, the church celebrates the festival of Candlemas, when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate him to God's service. You can read about this in Luke 2:22-38. The following retelling of the story focuses on the event from the viewpoint of the prophet Anna, who is so excited by what she sees that she becomes one of the first evangelists of the gospel.

Get set

Set the scene for this story by describing the great temple in Jerusalem. It would have been a breath-taking sight for this young couple from the north. The splendour of a famous religious building contrasts with the tiny bundle of the baby in Mary's arms and the poor man's gift of two pigeons that Joseph was carrying.

To tell Anna's story, you could draw a number of intriguing items from a mystery box – for example, a duster, a cup and saucer, a prayer book, a shawl, a great grandma picture.

Develop the story further by asking the children to imagine being someone in the congregation.

- What did you see happen?
- What did you do?
- What did you make of it all?

I wonder how people responded to Anna's eager evangelism that day?

Go!

Great Grandma Anna was unstoppable.

Most great grannies when they reach their eighties are about ready to put their feet up; to take things a bit easier and let others do the rushing about and the worrying. But not Anna!

Nothing seemed too much trouble for Anna. She was unstoppable. She was as busy serving God and his people at 84 years old as she had been at 24! The temple in Jerusalem was the centre of her life. It wasn't just the services where morning and evening, rain or shine, she was always there in the front row, singing and praying her heart out, but she was also there for all the routine temple jobs:

- She did the cleaning – so well that no one ever had to use a dusty prayer book.
- She made the tea – so well that no one ever went away thirsty.
- She welcomed people at the door – so well that no one ever felt a stranger.
- She was always ready with a smile, a kind word for the lonely or a special prayer for those in trouble. They called her the Prophetess and that was quite an honour in those days. Very few



women in history had been given such a special title.

Great Grandma Anna was unstoppable. But Great Grandma Anna had a special secret too. From time to time, she shared it with those who were ready to listen. You see, when she was praying, singing, welcoming, making the tea, cleaning and caring for others, she was also doing something else. She was on the lookout. She was waiting for God's promised rescuer - the one that God had said would come to sort out the mess of this world. She was sure she was going to meet him one day, although time was ticking on for Anna.

It was a very ordinary morning when something most extraordinary happened. A young couple arrived with their six-week-old baby for a special thank-you service. Anna, as usual, was unstoppable, handing out the books, smiling to the worshippers and welcoming new visitors. But when she saw this couple, and in particular this baby boy, she thought that there was something special about him. But what was it? By the time she went into the service to join with everyone for the celebration, she saw a most amazing thing.

The baby was no longer in the arms of his mother but had been picked up by a friendly, elderly man. She knew him, because he often visited the temple - younger than her but even so a granddad in his own right! But that wasn't the most remarkable thing - this granddad was singing! A singing granddad! For once the unstoppable Anna was stopped in her tracks.

Grandad Simeon - that was his name - was singing about the baby:

*Now I can go in peace
And my long waiting cease.
God's rescuer has come
A light for everyone.*

Anna gazed open-mouthed. There had been something special about this baby. This was the one she had been waiting for. God's special rescuer. God's special light for the world. A baby! Of course, how like God to take them all by surprise.

Anna was so excited that she'd finally met the one she'd been waiting for. The baby Jesus! He was the light of the world. And of course Anna could not contain herself. She told everyone about it.

- She told the people, who came to the temple doors.
- She told the people, who drank her temple tea.
- She told the people she prayed with on the temple steps.
- She told the people with whom she cleaned the temple ornaments.

Because of this Great Grandma, lots of people got to hear about Jesus, the light of the world. Anna was unstoppable and so, it turned out, was the light that was Jesus.