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PRAYERS OF OLD PEOPLE: ZECHARIAH, SIMEON AND ANNA

Krzysztof Mielcarek

The bibliography of biblical literature is full of studies devoted to the Lucan depictions of the main figures in the Infancy Narrative¹. However, it is difficult to find a study in which prayers of people advanced in years are treated as the central subject. Since every character mentioned above is of old age it seems worthwhile to examine the way in which Luke portrayed their prayers. Thus the article will concentrate on particular details of the Lucan texts, which will hopefully enable us to reveal something

¹ Some major Polish studies are as follows: F. GRYGLEWICZ, *Teologia hymnów Łukaszej Ewangelii Dzieciństwa* (RWTK 40; Lublin 1975); idem, "Teologiczne aspekty błogosławieństwa Symeona (Łk 2,29-35)", *RTK* 19/1 (1972) 73-82, S. KOTWIŃSKI, "Posłannictwo Jezusa w świetle wypowiedzi Symeona (Łk 2,25-35)", *WST* 3 (1985-1990) 147-158; M. MIKOŁAJCZAK, "Proklamacja tożsamości Jezusa w świątyni jerozolimskiej (Łk 2,25-38)", *SzSK* 7-10 (1997-2000) 37-44; J. KOZYRA, "Chrystologiczne hymny i kantyki Nowego Testamentu", *Verbum caro factum est. Księga pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Tomasza Jelonka w 70. rocznicę urodzin* (eds. R. BOGACZ – W. CHROSTOWSKI) (Warszawa 2007) 289-304; T. LEWICKI, "Ewangelia Miłosierdzia. Orędzie Jezusa w przekazie Łukasowym", *StPl* 38 (2010) 131-138; A. TRONINA, "Lumen ad revelationem gentium (Łk 2,32). Bóg objawia się wszystkim narodom", *Gaudium in litteris. Księga jubileuszowa ku czci ks. abpa prof. Stanisława Wielgusa* (eds. S. JANECZEK – W. BAJOR – M.M. MACIOLEK) (Lublin 2009) 403-411.

about prayers of old people. A short introduction should help to explain some methodological presuppositions and exegetical theological limitations. The paper consists of three main parts corresponding to the three main figures mentioned in the title. Conclusions will exhaust the content of the last paragraph.

1. SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In her analysis of Simeon's pericope (Luke 2:5-35) B. Schmitz² has presented some very valuable observations that might be easily related to a wider context. She is convinced that every piece of the text of the Infancy Narrative should be discussed within the context of the whole Lucan work. It should also be kept in mind that the main reason for Luke to include certain scenes within his double volume composition was a clear presentation of the identity of Jesus Christ and his salvific role. Thus the whole structure of Luke-Acts is subordinate to this very goal. For the purpose of our study such a statement signifies that prayers of old people in the Gospel of Luke are not the main thread of the Lucan theology.

Moreover, the Lucan literary form of speech has a very special function since it gives occasion to the author to inform a reader in a narrator-like manner about his theological perspective. According to the German exegete the prayers in Luke 1-2 are not in fact genuine prayers since their main function is to inform or to recount³. Moreover, most of them are not directed towards God, but towards some other characters within the narrative and thus serve to connect them to each other. On another level of the narrative readers see

² B. SCHMITZ, "Leben aus der präsentischen Ermutigung Gottes. Überlegungen zu Simeons Gebet (Lk 2,25-35)", *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament*. Vierte europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sămbăta de Sus 4-8 August 2007 (Hrsg. H. KLEIN – V. MIHOC – K.W. NIEBUHR) (WUNT 249; Tübingen 2009) 207-209.

³ SCHMITZ, "Leben aus der präsentischen Ermutigung Gottes", 209.

their own privileged positions because they seem to be much better informed about the sense of the reported events.

Besides, in order to interpret these texts rightly one needs to consider their intra- and intertextuality. The first term has to do with some inner, lexeme or motive-like relationships of the pericope with some other texts in Luke-Acts, while the other speaks mainly about the connections and similarities of the Lucan motives to other literary works.

The material taken as the field of research in this paper cannot be categorized easily. The prayer of Zechariah (The *Benedictus*) has indeed a lot to do with the hymn of Simeon (The *Nunc Dimittis*), but neither the size nor the content are the same. The third figure of Anna was left by Luke with no specific words of prayer and one could only analyse some Lucan terms in order to comment on it. Nonetheless, all the three are characterised as “advanced in years”⁴ and all of them prayed to God.

2. ZECHARIAH AND HIS PRAYER

Each narrative character will be treated in a two-step study. First, all the information given by Luke about the examined characters will be analysed in its full content. Then the prayer of the particular figure will be discussed.

2.1. Figure’s profile

Zechariah is the first character of the Infancy Narrative that Luke introduces to his readers. In Luke 1:5 he is told to be a priest (*hiereus*)⁵ of the division of Abijah. According

⁴ Descriptions of Zechariah and Anna are not identical (*probebēkotes en tais hēmerais autōn* – Luke 1:7; *autē probebēkuia en hēmerais pollais* – Luke 2:37). In the case of Simeon Luke says nothing about his age, but the context is clear, cf. Lk 2:26.29).

⁵ The Lucan description of Zechariah’s priesthood contradicts the testimony of *Protevangelium of James* 8:1-3. Its author claims that Zechariah was a high priest.

to J.A. Fitzmyer⁶ there were 24 groups of priests and each of them served twice a year for a period of a week⁷. Thus Zechariah belongs to one of the priestly families that served in the Jerusalem Temple. His name is well recognized among priests (1 Chr 15:24; 2 Chr 35:8; Neh 11:12) and its meaning fits well to the Lucan narrative: *YHWH has remembered*. Elisabeth⁸, his wife, also belonged to the priestly tribe of Aaron and both spouses were righteous (*dikaioi*) before God. An important feature of their situation was the lack of children, and they were already well advanced in years (v. 7). The last but not least detail of the Lucan description of Zechariah is his reaction of disbelief to God's message given to him by the angel (v. 20). However, his failure finds its counterpart in an act of faith in the further stage of the narrative in the scene of circumcision (v. 63).

2.2. The Benedictus

It is not the place to study Zechariah's prayer diachronically. There are many scholars who treat Luke 2: 68-79 as a separate hymn that Luke inserted into his narrative with some minor changes⁹. In this study, however, the existing interrelations between the Lucan scenes are important as such and thus the text will be handled synchronically.

Zechariah's canticle serves two functions¹⁰. It expresses his "praise of God" (1:64) and it acts as an answer to the question posed in 1:66b. The whole episode consists in fact of two parts. The first one is the account of the circumcision, naming and manifestation of John to the relatives and neighbours (1:59–66b). The second

⁶ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*. Introduction, translation, and notes (AB 28; New Haven – London 1985) 322.

⁷ Cf. H. STRACK – P. BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (München 1922–1961) II, 55–68.

⁸ The meaning of her Hebrew name is discussed. Some translate it, "My God is the one by whom to swear" whereas others propose, "My God is fullness", cf. Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 552 (electronic edition).

⁹ FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, 378.

¹⁰ FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, 375.

is Zechariah's canticle (1:68-79). Luke clearly wants his readers to see Zechariah's canticle as a hymn directed to God (*eulogōn ton theon* – 1:64). Moreover, it is uttered as the result of the intervention of the Holy Spirit (1:67), which was foretold in the vision of the angel in the Temple (1:20). Vv. 76-77 are closely related to the question posed by the neighbours and relatives (v. 66b)¹¹. The narrative part serves to give the canticle a prepared setting, but it is the *Benedictus* that functions as the key pericope.

It is a composition built up of numerous phrases drawn from the Greek OT. A. Plummer¹² has offered a very appealing comparison of the Lucan work and many OT quotations that show a high degree of conformity. In other words, Luke did not create the poem himself, but he weaved it from the fabric well known to his readers.

See the verses juxtaposed below:

w. 68a	Ps 41:14, 72:18, 106:48.
w. 68b	Ps 111:9
w. 69	Ps 132:17
w. 69b	Ezek 29:21
w. 71	Ps 106:10
w. 72a	Mic 7:20
w. 72b	Ps 106:45.
w. 73	Exod 2:24
w. 74	Jer 11:5
w. 75	Ps 105:8, 9
w. 76	Mal 3:1
w. 79a	Is 9:1
w. 79b	Ps 107:10

The present structure of the *Benedictus* has a typical concentric character with the Israel's covenant paralleled to the promise given to Abraham at its centre¹³:

¹¹ J. NOLLAND, *Luke 1:1–9:20* (WBC 35A; Dallas 2002) 82, disagrees.

¹² A. PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke* (London 1896) 39.

¹³ A chiastic structure like this was proposed by many scholars, cf. F. MICKIEWICZ, *Ewangelia według świętego Łukasza. Rozdziały 1–11* (NKB.NT III/I; Częstochowa 2011) 148-149.

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
Because he **has visited** and brought redemption
to his people,

⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of **salvation** for us
in the house of David his servant,

⁷⁰ Just as he spoke through the mouth of his holy **prophets** from of old.

⁷¹ Salvation from our **enemies**

and **from the hand** of all who hate us,

⁷² to show mercy to **our fathers**

and to remember **his holy covenant!**

⁷³ **The oath which he swore** to Abraham

our father

to grant us, ⁷⁴ without fear

(having been rescued **from the hand**

of enemies)

to worship him ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness — in his presence all
our days!

⁷⁶ You, child, will be called **prophet** of the Most High,

For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ To grant the knowledge of **salvation** in the forgiveness of their sins,

to his People¹⁴

⁷⁸ Because of the tender mercies of our God,

In which he **will visit** us: a sunrise out of heaven

⁷⁹ to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace¹⁵.

In this way what once was a point of arrival in the prayer of Mary (Luke 1:55)¹⁶ is now made the very core of the priestly representative's prayer (v. 73a). Yet, the canticle could be structured differently. Regarding its content one may distinguish four parts¹⁷:

¹⁴ The order of the Greek phrase is difficult to be fitted in the English syntax.

¹⁵ The text of the translation is taken from J. Nolland's commentary, with some minor changes (*Luke 1:1–9:20*, 82).

¹⁶ The similarities of both canticles have been widely recognised, cf. J. NOLLAND, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, 83.

¹⁷ Such a division has been proposed by FITZMYER, *Luke I–IX*, 378. On the previous page readers will find some alternative proposals of dividing the canticle.

- I. First reason for the praise of God (vv. 68b-71b)
- II. Redemption and salvation + covenant and oath given to Abraham (vv. 72a-75).
- III. The role of John (vv. 76-77).
- IV. Conclusion (vv. 78-79)

Such a structure shows its general unity with the rest of the Infancy Narrative modelled by Luke to tell the reader a story about the beginnings of Jesus as a continuation of the history of salvation.

What is the character of Zechariah's prayer? Luke suggests it immediately before the prayer for he describes Zechariah's action as praising God (*eulogōn ton theon* – v. 64). The Greek verb *eulogeō* usually means “to praise,” “to speak well of” or “to bless”¹⁸. Such a nature of the prayer is supported by the introductory words of Zechariah because he calls God *eulogētos* (v. 68a). This formula of praise is well-known in the LXX and was employed mostly in the Psalter (Ps 41:14; 72:18; 106:48; cf. 1 Chr 16:36; 1 Kgs 1:48)¹⁹. The Greek text of the Old Testament has also many instances where God is said to be “blessed” (*eulogētos*). Most cases are connected with prayers (e.g. Exod 18:10; Gen 9:26; 24:27). However, sometimes the term is used for humans to stress their relations to God “blessed by God”²⁰. If one looks closer at the content of the *Benedictus* one can see a dose of certainty that Zechariah's prayer might be judged as praising God primarily in the first two parts of the hymn (vv. 68b-75b) and in the last one (vv. 78-79).

The second feature of Zechariah's prayer is a prophecy. In v. 67 Luke informs that the father of John the Baptist prophesied (*eprophēteusen*). Since a prophetic utterance could apply to the present times as well as to the future the whole canticle could be treated as a prophecy. However, if we focus on the question posed by the neighbours

¹⁸ Cf. BDAG (electronic edition) in Bible Works 8.0.

¹⁹ FITZMYER, *Luke I–IX*, 382.

²⁰ See further F. HAUCK and G. BERTRAM, *TDNT* IV, 362-370.

(v. 66b) it is the third part of the Lucan composition that fits best (vv. 76-77).

This general categorisation mentioned above should be completed with some minor observations. Right from the very beginning Luke uses a historical perspective in the prayer of Zechariah. In some ways, his prayer looks to the past, seeing the ancient promises as fulfilled. This impression is deepened by the Old Testament quotations and formulations. In v. 68 Zechariah speaks of God visiting and redeeming his people (*episkeptomai, lutrōsin poiein*) and in the next lines he continues this theme, speaking about “the house of David” (*oikos David* – v. 69)²¹ referring to the past (*ap’ aiōnos* – v. 70)²² and shaping Israel’s enemies only in a general manner (*pantes misountōn hēmas* – v. 71). Then he mentions “fathers” (*pateres*) and “his holy covenant” (*hagia diathēkē autou* – v. 72) and finishes going back to Abraham and God’s promise given to him (*horkos* – v. 73). All these terms show Zechariah as a man aware of the history of his people. He lived long enough to be convinced that God was faithful to Israel and that is why he sees the future in an optimistic way. His son is a good sign of victorious events that are to come (vv. 76-79).

3. SIMEON’S PRAYER

Simeon and Anna are so closely related to each other that it is nearly impossible to escape the impression of the Lucan plan to prepare another double panel like the one concerning Zechariah and Mary (1:5–2:20). For the purpose of this article, however, both characters will be presented separately.

²¹ It is an allusion to the dynastic oracle of Nathan (2 Sam 7:12-13).

²² FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 383, points out that the phrase must be Lucan.

3.1. Figure's profile

The portrayal of Simeon begins in Luke 2:25. It is not easy to explain the Hebrew meaning of his name. In the folk etymology it could mean a little hyena²³, but it is more suitable to connect it with the Hebrew root word *šm* “to hear.” In this case his name signifies a man who has been heard by God. J. Fitzmyer²⁴ sees two possible solutions. His name is either a diminutive of *šēma* “God has heard” or derives from *šēma* “Yahweh has heard”, shortened to *Šimēōn*.

Readers do not know much about him²⁵, but Luke wants them to be sure of a few important things. First of all, Simeon lives in Jerusalem (Gr. *Ierousalēm*) and it is worth noticing how important the Holy City, along with the double form of its name, is for the third evangelist²⁶. Just like Zechariah, Simeon is a righteous man (*dikaïos*), but in his case Luke adds one more adjective: he is also devout (*eulabēs*)²⁷ as Ananias who will be portrayed later (Acts 22:12; cf. 2:5; 8:2). His Jewish identity and closeness to God made him living with a vivid expectation of consolation to Israel. Therefore, his perspective is not personal or individualistic, but is focused on the people of Israel²⁸. His continuous readiness to receive God's revela-

²³ Cf. *BDB*, 1035.

²⁴ FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 426.

²⁵ R. BROWN, *The Birth of the Messiah*. A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (London 1977) 437, notices that Greek formula introduces an unknown person to the reader.

²⁶ See details in K. MIELCAREK, *Ierouslaēm, Hierosolyma*. Starotesamentowe i hellenistyczne korzenie Łukaszewego obrazu świętego miasta w świetle onomastyki greckiej (Lublin 2008) 25-74, 201-227.

²⁷ Some later Christian literature described Simeon as a high priest or teacher, but it has no grounds in the text; see *Prot. Jas.* 24.4; *Acts Pil.* 16.2, 6. Some decades ago A. Cutler, “Does the Simeon of Luke 2 Refer to Simeon the Son of Hillel?”, *JBR* 34 (1966) 29-35, suggested that Simeon could be a son of Hillel and father of Gamaliel.

²⁸ See F. BOVON, *Luke 1. A commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50* (Minneapolis, MN 2002) 100.

tion and his salvific gifts are supported by the Holy Spirit who remains on him (*ep' auton*). In other words, he is well equipped and prepared for his prayer and totally directed towards God. His unusual piety was rewarded abundantly by God for he was told not to die before seeing the Messiah. The reader is informed that this very moment has come and that is why Simeon is present in the Temple. Luke says no more in his brief account, but he allows Simeon to add something later (v. 29). In his prayer he considers himself a servant (*doulos*).

As it has been stated in the beginning his age is not mentioned. However, both v. 26 and v. 29 suggest that he is close to death (*mē idein thanaton, apoluein en eirēnē*). Obviously, it is theoretically possible that Simeon is young but terminally ill; however, in that case the lack of information on the part of the evangelist would be difficult to resolve. Thus one must conclude that Simeon is a very old man, nearly facing death²⁹, who God promised to see the Messiah beforehand.

3.2. The *Nunc Dimittis*

The *Nunc Dimittis* is a relatively short prayer. It consists of three subsequent pairs of colons (v. 29; vv. 30.31; v. 32). Thus the structure would look as follows³⁰:

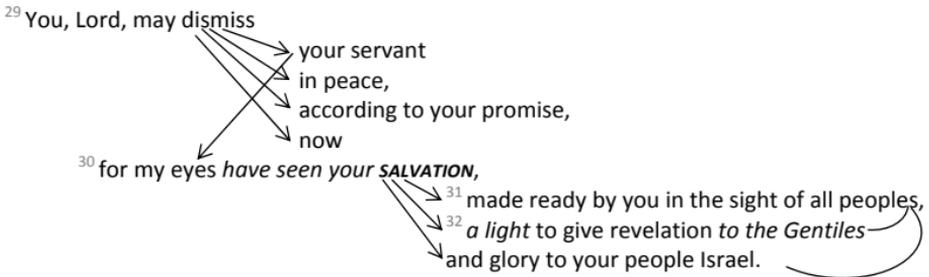
²⁹ Now you may dismiss your servant, Lord, in peace,
according to your promise,
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ made ready by you in the sight of all peoples,
³² a light to give revelation to the Gentiles
and glory to your people Israel³¹.

²⁹ The author of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (15.2) claims that he was 112 years old.

³⁰ Thus it is seen by J. Fitzmyer (*The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, p. 421) and J. Nolland (*Luke 1:1-9:20*, p. 116).

³¹ The text is that of Fitzmyer, cf. *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, p. 418.

Nevertheless, the syntax allows structuring it differently:



The Lord God is the main subject of the first part of the hymn with his clear relation to Simeon (*doulos*), peace (*eirēnē*), the promise/word (*rhēma*) and temporal circumstances (*nun*). Their links are secured through the action of the dismissal (*apoluō*). V. 30 starts with the metonymy of eyes, but it focuses on God’s salvation which is paralleled to its preparation for peoples³². The last parallelism (v. 32) is epexegetically connected to v. 30 for it explains that God’s salvation is “a light” (*fōs*) and “a glory” (*doxa*). However, it is also synonymic because here the Gentiles are equalized with Israel as two parts of all peoples (*pantōn tōn laōn*).

One of the most striking features of the *Nunc Dimittis* prayer is its answer-like character. It is a true dialogue between man and God. God acted first, showing his salvation. Simeon responds with faith, praising God for his fidelity. He is aware that God has just fulfilled his promise and thus his action deserves reaction. That is why Simeon starts his prayer with “now” (*nun*)³³. He knows that the soteriological *kairos* that he has been waiting for has come finally. Luke adds another aspect of the prayer, telling his

³² Since Simeon utters his prayer, holding Jesus in his arms it is clear that the term “salvation” is another metonymy and implies Jesus himself. It is enough to juxtapose v. 26 with v. 30).

³³ In Luke-Acts a similar function is given to another Greek term: *sēmeron* (“today”).

readers that Simeon praised (*eulogēsen*) God (v. 28). His blessing resembles the prayers of other people in Luke (Luke 1:64; 24:53)³⁴.

An important mark of the prayer is also its humbleness. God is named *despotēs* (“Master”)³⁵ while Simeon calls himself a servant (*doulos*). The old man addressing Yahweh has a lowly attitude just like Jesus suggests it later (Luke 18:13). Having a close relationship with God Simeon recognises that God’s plan is fulfilled now and that he is free of his duty.

Furthermore, his servant’s identity is connected to the role of the Holy Spirit in his life (vv. 25-27). Simeon does not only constantly enjoy the assistance of the Spirit of God but is also led by him to the temple. The Spirit sends forth the prophecy and sees to its fulfilment. Therefore, the prayer should also be understood as a prayer in the Holy Spirit.

F. Bovon³⁶ stresses the role of the verb in the present tense form (*apoluēis*) which may emphasize the imminent character of Simeon’s death and his readiness for it. The Swiss exegete sees the *Nunc Dimittis* as “a conversation with God at the moment of death.” According to him Luke gives a strong contrast here since Simeon stands before death while Jesus’ life has just begun.

One should also emphasise the space where the prayer takes place. The role of the Temple in Luke-Acts is well known³⁷ and in the case of both Simeon and Anna their

³⁴ C. WESTERMANN, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia 1978) 64-102, esp.85 ff. notices that blessings in Luke-Acts go in both directions.

³⁵ It is not a frequent title for God in the LXX and appears mostly in the late books with a few exceptions (Gen 15:2.8; Josh 5:14; Jonah 4:3 (with *nun!* – the context is negative but the similarities are obvious); Isa 1:24; 3:1; 10:33; Jer 1:6; 4:10; 15:11), see more in K. H. RENGSTORF, “*despotēs*, ktl.”, *TDNT* II, 44-49; G. HAUFE, “*despotēs*, ktl.”, *EDNT* I, 290-291.

³⁶ See. *Luke 1*, p. 103.

³⁷ See. M. MIKOŁAJCZAK, *Teologia świętyni w dwudziele św. Łukasza* (Lublin 2000) 181-184, bibliography: pp. 185-214. See also the interna-

prayers happen in the enclosure of the Temple (*hieron*). For Luke the Temple is a privileged place where God's revelation and some key salvific actions take place (Luke 2:46.49; 19:45-47).

The prayer of Simeon is exceptional in more than one way. It is absolutely unique in his address towards God – he holds Jesus in his arms. Indeed, it was God's and parents' will that Simeon received Jesus to hold him in his arms. Thus his prayer becomes truly Christian because he prays to God looking at Jesus – the Son of God and his Messiah. As a representative of the people of the Old Testament he is an example of proper response to God's messianic activity. He eagerly receives Jesus, which will not always will be the case among his countrymen (Luke 4:24)³⁸.

Finally, Simeon's blessing has clearly an eschatological meaning. The revelation given to him serves the evangelist to show that the praying old man lives in his? last days. Exactly in the same verse one can see some universalistic overtones. In fact, it is the very first place where Luke shows his interest in the subject of salvation given to all. Some texts in the Old Testament have already spoken about Lord's goodness "in the sight of the children," which corresponds to "in the presence of all peoples" in Luke 2:31 (cf. Ps 30:20[LXX]; Isa 64:3[LXX]). The same universalistic thread continues in v. 32 where Israel is put together with the Gentiles. Here "the light" (*φῶς*) is paralleled to "glory" (*doxa*). Thus both God's preparation and its fulfilment are addressed to all people, just as Deutero-Isaiah has foreseen (Isa 42:6; 49:6; 46:13; cf. 60:1-3). However, the reader might wonder why the Gentiles are put first³⁹.

tional bibliography enclosed in the book of M. BACHMANN, *Jerusalem und der Tempel*. Die geographisch-theologischen Elemente in der lukanischen Sicht des jüdischen Kultzentrums (BWANT 39; Stuttgart 1979).

³⁸ The theme of receiving Jesus runs through the whole work of Luke; cf. Luke 8:13; 9:5.48.53; 10:8.10; 18:17; Acts 8:14; 11; 17:11.

³⁹ BOVON, *Luke 1*, 103, suggests Luke's allusion about the future development of evangelization (cf. Acts 28:26-28).

4. THE PRAYER OF ANNA

Luke does not spend so much time to characterise Anna. Neither is her prayer specifically quoted. Nevertheless, she is a true parallel⁴⁰ to the old man from Jerusalem and thus she is a good case to study.

4.1. Figure's profile

The first information that Luke gives to his readers is her name. The Greek form, *Anna*, derives from the Hebrew name *Hannāh* meaning “grace, favour”⁴¹. The reader is invited to some the obvious Old Testament associations (1 Sam 1–2; Tob 2; 11). Anna's name, along with her prophetic identity (*profētis* – v. 36), forms an asyndentic phrase and according to the custom of the Old Testament prophets the name and the tribe of her father are added. Phanuel is attested in 1 Chr 4:4 and possibly in 8:25⁴² (in Gen 32:31 and Judg 8:8, it is a place-name) and means “the face/appearance of God”⁴³. *Asher* is a northern tribe and its Hebrew meaning is “Good Fortune or Blessed

⁴⁰ Luke very often balances male and female figures in his narrative, e.g. in the Infancy Gospel (Zechariah and Mary – 1:5-38) and elsewhere (4:25-27; 7:36-50; 15:3-10. N. M. FLANAGAN, “The Position of Women in the Writings of St. Luke”, *Marianum* 40 (1978) 292-293, discovers thirteen man–woman parallel stories in the third Gospel). See also T.K. SEIM, *The Double Message. Patterns of Gender in Luke–Acts* (Edinburgh 1994) 11-24.

⁴¹ P. LEFEBVRE, “Anne de la tribu d’Asher. Le bonheur d’une femme (Lc 2,36-38)”, *Revue Sémiotique et Bible* 91 (1998) 7, sees here an allusion to the scene of Annunciation (Luke 1:28.30). He rightly points to the fact that Anna's name corresponds to the name of John – “God has done grace”.

⁴² See the textual critical information in R. BAUCKHAM, “Anna of the Tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36-38)”, *RB* 104 (1997) 180. The author also mentions an ostracon from Beersheba with the name of Phanuel.

⁴³ On the OT phrase of ‘the face of God’ used as a metaphor for God's favour, cf. BAUCKHAM, “Anna of the Tribe of Asher”, 181-184.

One” (cf. Gen 30:13)⁴⁴. Its northern origin secures full representation of Israel in the presence of God’s Messiah within the Lucan narrative⁴⁵. Thus salvation is directed not only to “all peoples” (v. 31), but also to the whole Israel (v. 32)⁴⁶.

The evangelist does not mention whether the Holy Spirit is present, but being a prophetess Anna must have acted by his inspiration. P. Lefebvre⁴⁷ considers her relationship with the Holy Spirit as a specific one and declares her as an expert in recognizing God’s actions. Luke seems to look at her in the line of Old Testament women that served God in the same way. She is like Miriam, Deborah and Huldah (Exo 15:20; Judg 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:14)⁴⁸.

Anna is a very old woman and the text does not give her exact age⁴⁹. J.K. Elliot⁵⁰ prefers to read the Greek phrase as the span of Anna’s widowhood rather than her age in its totality⁵¹. Nevertheless, it is possible that her age or the span of her widowhood are symbolic (84=7x12!) and refer typologically to Judith (cf. Jdt 16:23). According to R.E. Brown⁵² the description of Christian widows in 1 Tim 5:3-16 has some striking similarities to the present portrayal of Anna, which may suggest either some influ-

⁴⁴ Cf. P. FIGUERAS, “Syméon et Anne ou le témoignage de la loi et des prophètes”, *NovT* 20 (1978) 84-99.

⁴⁵ BAUCKHAM, “Anna of the Tribe of Asher”, 184.

⁴⁶ Luke’s way of introducing Anna is typical to the Jewish environment; cf. Jdt 8:1-2, Tob 1:1-2.

⁴⁷ Cf. LEFEBVRE, “Anne de la tribu d’Asher”, 10.

⁴⁸ One could also think of the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), but Anna certainly belongs to the OT times. In Luke Anna, along with Simeon and John, are prophets in the time of the eschatological turn (Acts 2:17); cf. BOVON, *Luke 1*, 106.

⁴⁹ There are few manuscripts attesting that her widowhood endured only seven years or even seven days; cf. J.K. ELLIOTT, “Anna’s age (Lk 2:36-37)”, *NovTest* 30 (1988) 100.

⁵⁰ ELLIOT, “Anna’s age (Lk 2:36-37)”, 100-102.

⁵¹ Others accept both possibilities; cf. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 431; NOLLAND, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 123.

⁵² BROWN, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 467-468; see NOLLAND, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 122.

ence of the Jewish ideal of widowhood on the Christian way of presenting it or the picture of Anna in Luke affected by the later developed Christian model.

4.2. Luke remarks on Anna's prayer

Anna is an example of a woman of prayer. She never leaves the temple and constantly⁵³ worships (*latreuō* [part. praes.] – v. 37) God fasting and praying. Naturally, this does not mean staying physically within the Temple courts twenty four hours a day. It rather expresses her full engagement in worshipping God in the Temple⁵⁴. She fasted and prayed just as it was expected from someone who was close to God (Mark 9:29; cf. 1 Esd 8:49; *Jerusalem Talmud Ta'an* 65c).

Luke stresses the very moment of Jesus' appearance in the temple (*hautē tē hōra* – v. 38) and specifies Anna's prayer as praising God (*anthōmologeomai tō theō*). Whatever her prayers were before, now it is a particular hour. The evangelist characterises her prayer with a *hapax legomenon* of the NT⁵⁵, which in most cases means a mutual agreement or recognising something, e.g. "sins" (Sir 20:3; cf. *Ant.* 8.10.3)⁵⁶. The Septuagint authors utilise also it to express their declaration in honour of someone (1 Esd 8:88) and an action of giving thanks to God or praising him gratefully (Ps 78:13; Dan 4:37; 3 Macc 6:33). What does Luke want to articulate? In some sense, Anna's address is not only a prayer directed to God. What makes it special is that it is also a testimony given to people gathered in the temple. At the moment of Jesus' appearance in the sanctuary Anna completes her prophetic identity

⁵³ "Night and day" is a merism meaning "always." The phrase starts with "night" because it was the Jewish way of calculating time.

⁵⁴ Luke utilises a similar phrase in case of the apostles (cf. Luke 24:53).

⁵⁵ One may find it only in 1 Esd 8:88; 3 Macc 6; 33; Ps 78:13; Sir 20:3; Dan 4:37.

⁵⁶ See T. & B. FRIBERG, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, in Bible Works 8.0 2009 (electronic edition).

and praises God, testifying to Jesus before Israel (*lutrōsis Ierusalēm*). Thus she kept acknowledging God's Messiah (*anthōmologeito* – imperf.) and was constantly (or repeatedly) speaking (*elalei* – imperf.) about him to all those who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (cf. Luke 2:32). Another feature of the verb used by Luke is worth noticing. The adverb *anti* presented with the verb gives Anna's prayer a certain notion of an answer⁵⁷. Thus it is God that takes initiative at the beginning of the salvation era, but people can and should answer it with a prayer of praise.

CONCLUSIONS

All of the three characters of the Lucan narrative pray to God in a specific manner, but one cannot say that this type of prayer is reserved only for old people. The fact that Zechariah is paralleled to Mary is an important sign of that. However, all of the three people praise God for the fulfilment of his past promises and thus their prayers have a historical-salvific perspective. They are also focused on the eschatological times of coming of God's Messiah, contrasting the past with the presence. The past is characterised by "walking in the darkness" whereas the future is full of light. Their prayers embrace a certain entirety (*pantes*) that at first corresponds to Israel alone, but in the canticle of Simeon it includes the nations as well. Their prayers are not just directed to God since they function as prophecies. Zechariah, Simeon and Anna are not merely praying figures, but they are also witnesses of God's initiatives. Luke wants to assure his readers that they are credible witnesses. Comparing these three prayers Simeon's prayer has the strongest link to prayers of old men because it is essentially connected to his death. He prays being fully aware of the end of his life and thus his prayer becomes an offering to God.

⁵⁷ Thus BOVON, *Luke 1*, p. 106.

Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera analizę trzech postaci z Łukaszej narracji o dzieciństwie Jezusa: Zachariasza (Łk 1,5-23.57-79), Symeona (Łk 2,25-35) i Anny (Łk 2,36-38). Osoby te łączy podeszły wiek oraz modlitwa, którą zanoszą do Boga. Mimo że poświęcony tym postaciom materiał nie jest do końca porównywalny, jest możliwe uchwycenie pewnych cech ich modlitwy: perspektywa historyczna, eschatologia i uniwersalizm. Wszystkie te postaci nie tylko modlą się do Boga, ale również dają o Nim świadectwo

Słowa klucze: modlitwa, starość, Zachariasz, Symeon, Anna, opowiadania o Dzieciństwie

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