

## In the Shadows

Anna

Luke 2:36-38

December 24, 2023

HDBC

In 2019 a NASA facility in West Virginia was renamed in honor of Katherine Johnson, who played a pivotal role in the first US mission to the moon. Johnson was depicted in the movie *Hidden Figures*. She worked for NASA at a time when the term human “computer” was a title given to those in charge of the advanced calculations required to make accurate orbital trajectories. Johnson and the many others who worked alongside her were never the face of NASA. They were **hidden away**, just doing their thing. But their contributions were invaluable.

Every successful operation has some **hidden figures**. According to Crowder the hidden figures in the Santa operation are the elves. In fact, he’s written a song just to bring them out of the shadows and give them their due. It’s called **The Elf Song**.

The lyrics highlight the hard work of the elves, who are tirelessly working long hours to meet their quotas, and how they are only paid only in cookies and candy. The song calls for more respect and recognition for the elves who make the magic happen at the North Pole. And here is how it is introduced by Crowder.

Play **The Elf Song Intro** and **The Elf Song**

I don’t know if Anna would appreciate being compared with Santa’s elves or even NASA’s hidden figures, but she was an important character in the birth of Jesus. She is the final person connected with the birth of Jesus in Luke’s gospel. She provides a sort of postscript to the story. Luke reveals 5 things about Anna.

### 1. She was a prophetess

She was one who received messages from God and shared them with people. So, she was close to the Lord and sensitive to His voice. As we said about Zacharias, she was **in the ministry**.

## 2. **She was an elderly widow**

She had been a widow for a long, long time. She married young (we assume), and her husband died after only seven years of marriage. At the time that this happened she was 84 years old. That was almost unheard of at that time. She had definitely elevated the average lifespan.

## 3. **She was a temple servant**

The implication is that at the time of her husband's death she dedicated herself to the Lord and to serving in the temple. Almost nun-like. Luke highlights her faithfulness. She refused to be lured away from her commitment by anything that she would consider to be less important. Paul would say toward the end of his life that he had *finished the course and kept the faith*. The same thing could be said about Anna.

The focus of her ministry was prayer and fasting. She was a hidden figure in every sense of the word. Prayer and fasting are things best done in secret. She had no need to be in the spotlight. She was content in the shadows as long as she could be a servant.

## 4. **She was watching for the coming Messiah**

As with Simeon, she was looking for the Messiah. Note how Luke put it. *She was looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*. She was anticipating a better time that would only be realized when the Messiah arrived.

## 5. **She was an evangelist for Jesus**

She was in the temple area and probably heard the declaration by Simeon. Of course, it would have arrested her attention. She, too, recognized Jesus as the promised one. And she began praising God and telling everyone who would listen.

Makes me wonder how often Simeon and Anna talked. Did they meet in the breakroom each day and talk about the coming Messiah? As a prophetess, did she have any word from God that the Messiah was coming that day?

There is something very tender about this closing scene in Luke's story of the birth of Jesus. Two faithful senior adults are given front row seats to the incarnation. They were allowed to look into the face of the one who made the

worlds yet had condescended to become part of that which He made. What can we learn from them?

### 1. They stayed

They stayed in their lanes. They followed the path God had laid out before them and refused to stray. Maybe they would say to us today, *whatever it is that God has called you to be and to do, stay with it. Don't get discouraged. Don't get distracted. Don't quit!*

### 2. They believed

When they came face-to-face with Jesus, they recognized who He was and entrusted their lives to Him. They realized that God had come down to be with them and with us.

Many years ago, when Joe Torres was named the manager of the Cardinals, someone offered some unsolicited advice. They suggested that maybe it would be easier to manage the team from up in the booth, high above the field where he could see everything much more clearly. His response was classic. He said, *upstairs, you can't look them in the eyes*. He was right. In Jesus, God chose to come down so He could look us in the eyes. And just as importantly so we could look Him in the eyes. Simeon and Anna did that and they knew He was the answer to their greatest need.

Maybe they would say to us, *whenever you meet Jesus, believe in Him, trust in Him. End your search and focus your life on Him.*

### 3. They shared

Both of these aged saints felt compelled to share the good news with others. They recognized that this was not something meant to be kept, but to be shared. And so, they did. Maybe they would say to us during this Christmas season, *tell the story. Like the songwriter, Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Don't keep it to yourself. Tell others about Jesus.*

Do you need a hero to imitate? You could do a lot worse than Anna.

Stay faithful to God's calling on your life, regardless of the daily grind.

Keep trusting in Jesus no matter how long the wait.

Share Jesus every chance you get.