

First Sunday after Christmas

At that moment, she [Anna] came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child.
—Luke 2:38 NRSV

Explore

Growth

paper, pencils

Many youth from the time of their birth have their physical growth measured by parents or guardians. Sometimes this growth is recorded by placing a simple pencil mark on the wall indicating the height. Sometimes this height measurement has permitted them to do certain things, while at other times forbidding them. In most cases the physical body continues to grow as one ages. While the body grows, so do the intellectual abilities and spiritual understandings. Using a line graph—with the age 0 being on the extreme left and 20 on the extreme right—ask the youth to complete the graph to describe their spiritual growth up to now.

Ask the youth to think about the events and growth experiences in their lives that have contributed to their spiritual growth. Invite them to write these on the line graph. Write them above the graph line indicating the age they experienced the event. Many of these moments may be easily recognized events such as their baby blessing, baptism, confirmation. Other moments of spiritual growth may be times when they were at an awesome worship service or when a speaker said something that helped make a connection between them and God. Perhaps there was a camp experience or campfire that stood out. Maybe it was while you were with friends that a spontaneous religious experience occurred.

To continue this activity, ask the youth to include events that, in looking back, took away from their spiritual growth. Again, write them near the mark that indicates how old they were at the time. Ask the following questions after the graph is completed.

What can you tell from your graph?

Do you see a pattern?

Do your spiritual growth events share things in common?

What were they?

What about the events that took from your spiritual growth?

What were they?

Below the completed graph, have the youth list three things they have discovered about their spiritual growth?

Extract

Simeon and Anna

Bible

The Community of Christ has a long history of prophetic awareness evidenced mostly through inspired counsel given and recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants. Consequently, the experience of Simeon and Anna may not be so difficult for us to understand.

Luke 2:22–40

Select from the scripture in Luke 2:22–40 words and phrases describing the prophetic awareness of Simeon. Search also for those indicators of the prophetic awareness of Anna (just, devout, waiting, Holy Spirit was upon him, revelation by the Spirit, took Jesus in his arms and blessed God, blessed Joseph and his mother, prophetess, lived in the temple complex, served God with prayers and fasting night and day, gave thanks to the Lord, spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem).

Mary and Joseph brought their baby in obedience to the laws of their faith, perhaps not fully realizing the significance of that act as a turning point in the course of humankind. The

presence of these two individuals, Simeon and Anna, who had lived their lives in hope that they would see the promised Messiah, was especially significant. Consider the significance of Jesus being blessed by both a patriarch and a matriarch of the faith at a moment when the old ways were left behind, and yet, used as a foundation to set a new direction and establish greater faith for the people of God.

Although the scriptural record does not tell us how long either Simeon or Anna lived after this time, we can imagine how often and with what enthusiasm they spoke of the infant they had faithfully and prayerfully waited for.

Experience

Blessing of Babies

Have the class discuss what they have observed and heard at the blessing of a child. The blessing of children is a sacrament of the church (Doctrine and Covenants 17:19). On a flip chart or chalkboard ask class members to list what the blessing might include: recognition of the child's name, words for protection and safety, words for the ability to learn of all things and of Jesus, and guidance and strength for parents. Ask if any of the blessings they have observed included prophetic words, insights, and challenges.

Flip chart or chalkboard, markers, chalk

Doctrine and Covenants 17:19

Invite a member of the Melchisedec priesthood to share her/his experience in blessing a child. What preparation do they make? What words and insights have come to them? Then discuss the responsibility or role of the congregation to nurture, love, support, and mentor the children in this case.

Melchisedec priesthood guest

Expand

Future Growth

With the new year many will probably make New Year's resolutions. Invite the class to consider how they might make a resolution or promise about their spiritual growth for the coming year. Ask them to consider the following (write on the flip chart or chalkboard).

Flip chart or chalkboard

Markers, chalk

What would your spiritual growth resolution include? What actions will you take this year to grow spiritually?

Ask the class to look again at their spiritual growth graph. Ask them how they will measure their progress in the future.

Close this class session by inviting the youth to pray for the opportunity to grow in the Spirit.