

“Heard by God”

1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11

Not everyone is in the mood to celebrate at Christmas – for one reason or another. And when everyone else is celebrating, it only sours the mood. So it is with Hannah in our text this evening.

Every year Elkanah went up with his family to worship the Lord at Shiloh – but this annual event was a harsh reminder to Hannah that she was childless. When Elkanah sacrificed – he would give portions to Peninnah and all her children. In love towards Hannah, he would give a double portion – as if she also had children to feed.

But Hannah wept and would not eat. It was bad enough that her barrenness seemed like a curse – but as Israel waited for the Messiah who would be born from their offspring – being without children made it seem like she was outside of that divine promise. And on top of all that, Peninnah would mock her, torment her and make her life miserable because of her barrenness.

There are times in your life when you might feel like Hannah because of your earthly circumstances – feeling cursed, rather than blessed, by God. You fall into the trap of thinking that God’s promises must be for someone else. You hear what the Bible has to say – but with what you are suffering – you wonder if He loves, and forgives, you.

This is the work of the devil – who is the father of all lies. He works to bring doubt into your life – trying to lead you into unbelief and despair.

Elkanah tries to comfort Hannah by saying – “Am I not more to you than ten sons?” The question ringing in your ears might be – “Is not the love and the provision of your heavenly Father sufficient for you?” But in the end, it is only the birth of a son that truly comforts Hanna – and it’s only the birth of the Son of God that brings real comfort to you.

Even in the bitterness of her soul, Hannah still looked to the Lord in faith and called upon His name. She prayed and made a vow to the Lord – that if He would grant her a son – she would give him over for the Lord’s service, all the days of his life.

Rather than bargaining with the Lord, she is entrusting her entire situation into the Lord's hands. She acknowledges that – if she received a son – it would be solely by the grace of the Lord, purely a gift from Him.

That is how you are to come before the Lord – not to manipulate Him to do your will – but to commit yourself and all your needs into His gracious hands, praying that His will be done – and trusting that He alone can help and save you.

Hannah prays without making a sound – and when Eli the priest sees her, he scolds her – thinking that she is drunk. But she explains that, in her grief, she is pouring out her soul to the Lord. And then she hears this blessing from the servant of the Lord – “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to Him.”

Blessed by the Lord, Hannah departs in peace. She eats, “and her face was no longer sad.” They return home, and when the time had fully come, “the Lord remembered her.” She conceived by her husband Elkanah and gave birth to a son, “and she called his name Samuel [which means, “heard by God”] – for she said, “I have asked for him from the Lord.”

As the birth of Samuel brought peace and joy to Hannah, so the birth of Jesus brings peace and joy to you – for in Jesus, God has answered your prayers in a most profound way.

In Christ, all your needs are supplied. All your petitions find their “yes” in Him. Christmas is living proof that you are blessed, and not cursed, by God – that God does indeed love you.

The Son of God takes on your flesh and blood in order to redeem you from the bitterness and sorrow that sin brings to your life. He comes to rescue you from your isolation, your barrenness – bringing you into His everlasting fellowship.

The birth of Christ shows that God is with you, and for you. As we hear in Rom. 8 – “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Having the unconquerable certainty of God's love for you in Christ – you are made to be like Hannah – whose sadness is relieved, who eats and drinks in peace at His table.

Jesus is your Samuel – the sure evidence that you have been “heard by God” – even before your prayers are offered. As it is written in Isaiah – “It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer.”

Just as Samuel entered into the presence of the Lord and remained there all his days – so the Son of God entered into human flesh and blood to remain there forever as true God and true man.

So fully does God become man that He who created the Virgin Mary – is dependent upon her, nursing at her breast – so that we may learn to long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word, so that we may grow up into our salvation.

When Samuel was weaned, he ministered to the Lord with Eli the priest in the place of sacrifice. In the same way, Jesus served His Father by becoming both priest and sacrifice – offering up His own body in sacrifice to atone for the sin of the world.

Through the humility of the cross, Jesus was brought low – and defeated all who would mock the children of God – even the devil himself. Through His resurrection, Jesus has exalted all who trust in Him. This is what Hannah proclaims after Samuel’s birth – just as Mary does in the Magnificat (which we will sing in a moment).

In Hannah’s prayer the exalted are humbled, and the humble are exalted. This is the way of the Lord – turning the world upside down – taking down the strong and self-sufficient who trust in themselves – and raising up the weak and needy who trust in Him.

Peninnah is put to shame, and Hannah rejoices. The Lord opens her womb to give birth to five more children after Samuel – even as He opens the womb of the Church to bring new life to all who believe and are baptized into Christ.

God wins His victories through humility – the humility of the manger and the cross – the humility of the font and the altar. Even now, in this Season of Advent – in humble and repentant faith we bow before the Lord – trusting that He gives us the peace of sins forgiven – and will exalt us in due time.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.