

## ***“The Birth of Samson”***

Judges 13:1-24

“And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.”

It seems like we’ve heard this before – it’s the “same song, second verse” – the same old story for the people of God throughout the Old Testament.

The Israelites don’t listen to the Word of the Lord – they forsake Him and run off after false gods – arousing God’s anger – who then sends calamity upon them. Realizing their sin and suffering the consequences – they cry out to the Lord for help – and the Lord delivers them.

That’s the recurring theme in the Book of Judges as well. The Lord raises up a judge, a deliverer – to rescue them from their calamity – to bring peace. And all goes well for a time – until the judge dies, and the people become spiritually complacent, forget the Lord, return to their evil ways ..... and the whole process starts all over again.

We can sit here and shake our heads in disgust at them – but the truth is that we are just like them. Life is good, things are going well – and we become complacent, we give in to the temptations of the world and the desires of our sinful flesh – and we forget God, we turn away from Him.

And so, the Lord uses hardships to shake us up – to wake us up to what our rebellion has brought. He calls us to repentance – so that we might call upon Him and look to Him for deliverance.

He does not forsake those who call upon Him in the day of trouble. He sends a Deliverer to restore us – Jesus Christ, who gives us peace.

The Lord works all things for our good – even the sufferings we endure. The ravages of sin are all around us. Sometimes it is the result of the sin WE have committed – and sometimes it’s simply the result of the sinful, fallen WORLD in which we live.

All suffering is a reminder of our sin and need of deliverance. The Lord repents us – so that we cry out to Him – seeking His forgiveness, His reconciliation and peace.

It is written in Proverbs 3: “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of His reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (v. 11-12).

The Lord disciplined His beloved, yet rebellious children, by giving them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. So also, in His love for you, He disciplines you. On one hand He allows you to suffer to show you the consequences of sin – and on the other hand, to show you His steadfast love, and His gracious deliverance.

The story of Samson’s birth is an Advent reminder that we are wayward children in need of deliverance – a reminder that God not only disciplines us, but sends someone to rescue us from our enemies in order to bring us back into His fatherly embrace.

To Manoah and his wife (who have been unable to have children), the Angel of the Lord declares: “You shall conceive and bear a son ... and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”

Out of the barrenness of her womb, the Lord creates life – and her son will become the judge, and the champion of God’s people. In the midst of their suffering, the Lord sends His deliverer to rescue them.

The Angel of the Lord who speaks to Manoah and his wife is not one of angels created by God in the beginning – He is an eternal and divine Being. Remember, angel literally means “messenger” – and as St. John’s Gospel reminds us, Jesus is “the Word made flesh.”

Jesus is the Son of God who has come in the flesh. He is the Message and Messenger of the Lord. This Angel of the Lord who speaks to Manoah and his wife is none other than the Son of God.

The Son of God comes down to announce the miraculous birth of the one through whom God the Father will deliver His people. It is a foreshadowing of what will take place centuries later when the Son of God would be miraculously born of a Virgin, to deliver His people. Let’s take a closer look at this miraculous birth recorded in Judges 13 and see how it point us to the Advent of the Christ.

Like Mary, the mother of our Lord, Manoah's wife heard and believed the message of the Lord. Now, both of these women had good reason to question God's promise. One had been unable to conceive for years and years – and the other was a Virgin. Yet both of them received the Lord's message in faith – even as Mary says – “Let it be unto me according to your word” (St. Luke 1:38).

After speaking to his wife, the Angel of the Lord then appeared to Manoah – just as the Lord would send His messenger to Joseph. In a dream, the Lord tells Joseph to take Mary as his wife – and to Manoah, the Lord confirms the truth He has spoken to his wife, and tells him their child is to be raised as a Nazirite.

Specifically, Samson was to be “set apart” and “dedicated” to the Lord. And is that not also a description of our Lord Jesus? The Word of the Lord came to Mary saying that, “the Holy One [the “set apart” One] to be born will be called the Son of God.” Jesus is “set apart” for the work of redeeming His people from their sin – delivering them from the power of the devil – and rescuing them from eternal death.

At first, Manoah didn't understand who this “man of God” was that he was talking to. “What is your name?” he asks. And the Son of God says – “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”

HIS is the name that is above every name – the name at which every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth – a name that would later be revealed as Jesus, because He will “save His people from their sins.” His name is indeed wonderful, as it is written: “For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given ... and his name shall be called Wonderful ... “ (Isaiah 9:6).

When Manoah offers a sacrifice to the Lord, He who is Wonderful did a wondrous thing – He ascended in the flame of the sacrifice – thereby revealing the very purpose for Christ's birth.

The Son of God descends to earth and becomes man, so that man might ascend into heaven. Jesus comes down to bring deliverance and salvation so that – through His sacrifice – you might arise with Him to a new and everlasting life.

Remember that Samson would win his greatest victory over the Philistines by his own death. He who had been captured would extend his arms between the two pillars and cause the building to collapse on himself – and on all the Philistines who were gathered there.

So also, Christ conquered all our enemies by extending His arms – being crucified between the two criminals – giving His life in order to save us.

The Advent of the Christ – His birth and life, His suffering and death – is so that the sinful and rebellious children of God might be rescued and redeemed – so that they might once again stand before God and live.

That is the message of Christmas – that Christ, true God and true man – came to save His people from their sins – and that in Him, God and sinners are reconciled.

Let us, then, during this season of Advent – look to Jesus as our Samson. Let us repent of our sins – and rejoice to receive Him who comes to us – He who is born to be our eternal Deliverer and Savior. Amen.