

Sunday 21 December 2025, Advent IV Choral Matins

1 Samuel 1.1-20

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She bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.

Today I want to remind you of something wonderful. It's something that we all know, but sometimes easily forget. It's quite simple, actually. The something wonderful is this: there are many ways to interpret the Bible. Our scriptures are so varied and so rich. Because we're accustomed to hearing them spoken of in a certain way, we can forget that there are many possibilities in them, many answers to questions, many new avenues of thought. It's wonderful, to me at least, that God has given us such a wealth of meaning, often in so few verses.

Take this morning's first lesson from 1 Samuel. On the face of it, we hear the story of Elkanah and his wife Hannah, his love for her and her longing for a child. We read of God's blessing on her; the barren woman bears a son. It's a lovely story, though bittersweet because that longed-for son is dedicated to the Lord. The boy Hannah wanted she gives up in thanksgiving for receiving him. A gift is returned to its giver.

We could interpret this story as an example of faithfulness: Hannah's faithfulness to God and God's faithfulness to her. We could see it as an example of how we should live as God's people. We should be patient in trials, willing to wait on God and his mercy. We could see Hannah's constancy in prayer as a model for us, her generosity towards God as something to imitate. We could see in the relationship between Elkanah and Hannah an example of true love that doesn't put conditions on another. He loves her despite her barrenness, something which in their culture was shameful.

Our scriptures are so rich. We could read this story as a typology. Hannah represents God's faithful people, longing for a child who would set them free of shame. Samuel's birth thus foreshadows the birth of Christ. Samuel is dedicated to the Lord, brought up in the Temple, in his Father's house. As he grows up, his will is completely subject to the will of God and he listens eagerly for, and obeys, the voice of his heavenly Father. He stands up for justice and brings salvation to many during his life. And, faithful to death, he is mourned by all Israel who like him love God.

A further possibility is to see in this text a connection between Samuel, the prophet and priest of God, and Sampson, the ruler of God's people. Both are nazirites, devoted to God from birth and forbidden to drink strong drink or cut their hair. In their respective offices they represent the messiah who is to come and be prophet, priest, and king. Samuel and Sampson fulfil their office during their lifetime and the Kingdom of Israel is sustained by their work. They point beyond themselves to Christ who is prophet, priest, and king. In their successes they point to his success. In their failures, they point to him who will succeed where they do not. This is another form of

typology: seeing the characteristics of the one whose coming would bring the Kingdom to fruition in those whose leadership paved the way for his advent.

In the richness of our scriptures, we might see in Hannah a precursor to the Virgin Mary. Both were loved by men despite the shame their condition brought them. Both were cared for by husbands who were given sons they did not expect. Both sing great songs of praise to God for his faithfulness. (If you have never read Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2, you will see in it a model for the Magnificat). Both have to come to terms with God's plan for their son, which is not what theirs might have been. And both ultimately lose their son in that service to God, yet remain faithful.

There are many ways to interpret the Bible. We read text, context, subtext, typology, connection, and a myriad varieties of application. As we approach Christmas yet again, with its many familiar Bible passages, let me encourage you to listen more attentively to the scriptures as they are read. Let me encourage you to think more deeply about them, to ponder what they might mean for your life and for your faith. And, if I may direct you to 1 Samuel again, let me encourage you to be like Hannah and bless the Lord for giving you a Son you did not expect, a Son to take away your shame, a Son who is a gift returned to His giver for your sake on the cross, a Son who, because he is God, will rule an everlasting kingdom as prophet, priest, and king.

Jesus is the messiah, the chosen of God, foreshadowed and foretold in scripture, longed-for by the people of Israel, and made known to us who are Abraham's children by faith. Hear him in the scriptures, turn to him in your hearts, and rejoice that all you desire you can find in him who was given as the answer to your crying out for someone to come and save you. *She bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord. Amen.*