

Gift of the Lord

First Sunday After Christmas Day

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

¹⁸ Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹ His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰ Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home...

²⁶ Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

The Story of Hannah (in her own words):

Good morning people of the Most High God, the God who made the heavens and the earth. God bless and keep you! Thank you for coming to our home – Elkanah and mine, and Penninah's and our children. My name is Hannah. My husband is from the tribe of Ephraim. In fact we lives in the mountains of the land that God gave to our people through his instructions to Moses and Joshua. I am his wife along with Penninah who had children. For many years I had no children.

Every year my husband would take the whole family from our town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD at Shiloh where the tabernacle is. It is the place where the arc of the LORD's covenant is housed. There we see the high priest Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who served there as priests of the LORD.

Whenever Elkanah offered a sacrifice, he would give portions of it to Peninnah and all her sons and daughters. He would also give one portion to me because he loved me, even though the LORD had kept me from having children. Because the LORD had made me

unable to have children, my rival, Peninnah, tormented me endlessly in order to make me miserable. This happened year after year. Whenever I went to the LORD'S house, Peninnah would make me miserable, and I would cry and not eat. My husband would ask me, "Hannah, why are you crying? Why haven't you eaten? Why are you so downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

One day, after I had a little something to eat and drink in Shiloh, I got up. (The priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the door of the Lord's temple.) Though I was upset, I prayed to the LORD while I cried. I made this vow, "LORD, if you will look at my misery, remember me, and give me a boy, then I will give him to you for as long as he lives. A razor will never be used on his head." While I was praying a long time in front of the LORD, Eli was watching my mouth. I was praying silently. My voice couldn't be heard; only my lips were moving. Eli thought I was drunk. "How long are you going to stay drunk?" Eli asked me. "Get rid of your wine."

I responded, "No, sir. I'm not drunk. I'm depressed. I'm pouring out my heart to the LORD. Don't take me to be a good-for-nothing woman. I was praying like this because I've been troubled and tormented."

Eli replied, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your request."

"May you continue to be kind to me," I said. Then I went my way and ate. I was no longer sad.

Early in the morning Elkanah and our family got up and worshiped in front of the LORD. Then we returned home to Ramah. Elkanah and I lived and loved as husband and wife, and the LORD remembered me. I became pregnant and gave birth to a son. I named him Samuel, which means God Hears, because I said, "I asked the LORD for him."

To keep his vow, Elkanah and the entire household again went to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD. But I didn't go. I told my husband, "I'll wait until the boy is

weaned. Then I'll take him and present him to the LORD, and he'll stay there permanently.”

“Do what you think is best,” my husband Elkanah told me. “Wait until you've weaned him. May the LORD keep his word.” I stayed and nursed my son until I had weaned him. As soon as I had weaned Samuel, I took him with me. I also took a three-year-old bull, half a bushel of flour, and a full wineskin. I brought him to the LORD'S house at Shiloh while the boy was a young child. Then we butchered the bull and brought Samuel to Eli. “Sir,” I said, “as sure as you live, I'm the woman who stood here next to you and prayed to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request. In return, I am giving him to the LORD. He will be dedicated to the LORD for his whole life.” And we worshiped the LORD there.

This was my prayer to the LORD:

“My heart rejoices in the LORD;
my horn is exalted in the LORD.
My mouth is bold against my enemies,
because I rejoice in Your salvation.

²“There is none holy as the LORD,
for there is none besides You,
and there is no rock like our God.

³“Do not multiply proud speech,
nor let arrogance come out of your mouth,
for the LORD is the God of knowledge,
and by Him actions are examined.

⁴“The bows of the mighty are broken,
but those who stumbled are girded with strength.

⁵Those that were full have hired out themselves for bread,
and those that were hungry ceased *to hunger*.
Even the barren has borne seven,
and she that has many children wastes away.

⁶“The LORD kills and makes alive;
He brings down to the grave and brings up.
⁷The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and lifts up.
⁸He raises up the poor out of the dust
and lifts up the oppressed from the dunghill
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a throne of glory.

“For the pillars of the earth belong to the LORD,
and He has set the world upon them.
⁹He will guard the feet of His saints,
but the wicked will be silent in darkness.

“For by strength shall no man prevail.
¹⁰ The adversaries of the LORD will be broken to pieces;
He will thunder against them out of heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth.

“He will give strength to His king
and exalt the horn of His anointed.”

Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, while the boy remained to minister to the LORD, in the presence of the priest Eli. We heard rumors that Eli’s sons were disrespectful to the LORD and those who came to worship. They demanded they receive meat before it was offered in sacrifice to the LORD. It was also rumored that that they were having inappropriate relations with the young women who worked in the tabernacle. I worried, but my husband said God would protect our child from such evils. After all, Samuel is a nazirite, “I did not object when you told me of your vow to the LORD; and we will not change now, Samuel will be dedicated to the LORD all his life!

So, my son Samuel, our gift of the LORD, now ministers before the LORD, my boy wearing a linen ephod. I make him a little robe and take it to him each year, when we go up with the family to offer the yearly sacrifice. The last time we went Eli blessed

Elkanah and me, and said, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and we then returned to our home.

I don't know if I will be blessed with other children, I do know that God had given me joy and improved my self-esteem! I know my boy Samuel is grow up in the presence of the LORD. Every time we visit he is stronger and wiser. We can expect God to do great and wonderful things and can trust God's goodness always to surprise us. When we presented our child to the LORD it was done with no strings attached. We cannot predict what God will do with our child or how his or our own lives will be affected, but we know that what follows will be in character with God's gracious and merciful nature.

Samuel is our ray of hope. We know that the LORD will save God's people and we pray we will live to see God's redemptive work in our lives and the life of our community. God does not abandon God's people forever. As we look back over God's dealings with Israel and your community of the faithful, we see that God has remained faithful. We have every reason to believe that God will still be faithful into the new year.

Stephens G. Lytch

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