

## 1 Samuel 1:9-11, 19-20; 2:1-10

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup> After **they** had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, **Hannah** rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. <sup>10</sup> She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. <sup>11</sup> She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a **nazirite** until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

<sup>19</sup> **They** rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife **Hannah**, and the Lord remembered her. <sup>20</sup> In due time **Hannah** conceived and bore a son. She named him **SAMUEL**, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."

<sup>1</sup> **Hannah** prayed and said,

"My heart exults in the Lord;  
my strength is exalted in my God.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in my victory.

<sup>2</sup> "There is no Holy One like the Lord,  
no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

<sup>3</sup> Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed.

<sup>4</sup> The bows of the mighty are broken,  
but the feeble gird on strength.

<sup>5</sup> Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,  
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

*The barren has borne seven,  
but she who has many children is forlorn.*

<sup>6</sup> **The Lord kills and brings to life;  
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.**

<sup>7</sup> **The Lord makes poor and makes rich;  
he brings low, he also exalts.**

<sup>8</sup> He raises up the poor from the dust;  
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes  
and inherit a seat of honor.  
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,

The books of Samuel tell the story of radical transformation that occurred in the life of Israel as that people moved from living together as a religious association of tribes to a centralized state with a monarch. Samuel is the main character, the prophet who finds and ordains the monarchs and exists as a prophetic counter-voice to their whims and fancies, pushing them to inclusive justice and God-centered authority. Curiously it's the story of the people wanting a king, to be like all the other peoples of the near east; while God calls them to be different, unique, but acquiesces to their desires, giving them all of what comes with a king – good and bad.

Today's selection tells of the origins of Samuel, born to Hannah the second of two wives, who although the favorite of her husband (Elkanah), is looked down upon by her sister-wife (Peninnah) and society, because she is barren: less than a full woman in the cultural perspective. The song or prayer of Hannah, her expression of gratitude to God for answering her prayer is a majestic poem, highlighting Hebrew thought and theology. It's strongly echoed elsewhere in the Bible specifically by David in 2 Samuel 22; the poet in Psalm 113 and the Magnificat of Mary in Luke 1:46-55.

**they**:: as we parachute into the story the "they" is the family of Hannah. Her husband Elkanah and his other wife Peninnah. Hannah is the favorite wife of Elkanah, rewarded with more food and favor, even though she's culturally "less than a full woman" for Peninnah is the only wife to have produced children, heirs.

**nazirite**:: In the Hebrew Scriptures, a nazirite or nazirite is one who voluntarily took a vow to serve God, best described in Numbers 6:1–21. "Nazarite" comes from the Hebrew word נָזִיר [nazir] meaning "consecrated" or "separated".[1] This vow required the person to abstain from alcohol, let the hair grow, and avoid defilement by contact with corpses. Curiously Hannah is accused of drunkenness as she prays, promising that should God give her a child, she would return him to God as a nazirite in his service (one who would never touch alcohol).

**SAMUEL**: the Hebrew name שְׁמוּאֵל (Shemu'el) means "God has heard".

**Hannah** : the Hebrew name חַנָּה (Channah) meaning "favor" or "grace".

**Hannah** prayed: the story of Hannah begins with her weeping in 1; and ends here with her singing a prayer of amazing theological development. It is her joy, but Yahweh's power. The incredible change of Hannah's status through this answer to prayer demonstrates the unique, transformative sovereignty of Yahweh who has no equal. Her prayer invokes the full spectrum of existence from war, food and children to life and death. Yahweh acts in a way as to birth justice, transforming the wrong into the right, lowering and raising in a way often foreign to our human notions of power, privilege and purpose. At the heart of Hebrew poetry (especially here) is Parallelism: a balanced repetition that repeats with a synonym, or contrasts (antithetical parallelism).

and on them he has set the world.

<sup>9</sup> “He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,  
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;  
for not by might does one prevail.

<sup>10</sup> *The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered;  
the Most High will thunder in heaven.*

*The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
HE WILL GIVE STRENGTH TO HIS KING,  
AND EXALT THE POWER OF HIS ANOINTED.”*

### Luke 1:46-55

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>46</sup> AND MARY SAID,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on *the lowliness of his servant*.

Surely, from now on *all generations will call me blessed*;

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

### QUESTIONS FOR EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

THESE PRAYER-POEMS ARE REMARKABLY SIMILAR. IS IT A QUESTION OF PLAGIARISM, A LACK OF ORIGINALITY, OR A BORROWING OF THE PAST LANGUAGE TO SAY WHAT IS UN-SAYABLE? HOW ARE YOU SHAPED BY THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE WHEN YOU TALK OF AND TO GOD? OR ABOUT HOW GOD MOVES IN THE WORLD? HOW IS THAT HELPFUL FOR YOU? HOW DOES IT COMPLICATE OUR EFFORTS TO TALK ABOUT FAITH WITH EACH OTHER, AND WITH THOSE WHO ARE BIBLICALLY ILLITERATE?

THE STORY OF HANNAH IS ONE OF VINDICATION. YET WITHIN THE LARGER STORY OF SAMUEL IT SHOWS HOW YAHWEH ACCOMPLISHES MANY THINGS THROUGH THE DIVINE WILL, WORKING TO REVERSE THE WAYS OF THE WORLD TO BRING ABOUT JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUS LIVING. IT’S NOT JUST SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS, BUT FIRST SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ETHICAL. IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU LONG FOR GOD TO REVERSE THE ORDER OF THE WORLD? HOW IS YOUR STORY PART OF THIS LARGER ONGOING STORY OF GOD’S RADICAL TRANSFORMATION: MAKING ALL THINGS NEW?

**Luke**, tells his gospel version of the life of Jesus based upon Mark’s gospel and eyewitness accounts the author claims to have gathered. Luke and Matthew are the only gospel to really tell the birth story of Jesus, highlighting different aspects. Only Luke records this prayer song of Mary. Luke contains Greek medical terms used to describe illness and is the only gospel to consistently focus on the group of women who traveled with and supported Jesus, presenting them as actors and participants in the gospel.

**AND MARY SAID:** Mary’s prayer is not only similar to that of Hannah’s in 1 Samuel 2 in theme, theology, the poetic use of parallelism, but also strikingly similar if not identical, in vocabulary. There are verses which are literal borrowings (albeit in Greek) of the Hebrew prayer recorded in 1 Samuel 2 & Psalm 113).

*lowliness* : this word has to do more with social position and economic power than with notions of righteousness or religious importance. Her position is compared to the promise of God to bring radical transformation to the social and economic ways of the world (as we see in verses 52-53). Curiously the prayer doesn’t talk of the Messiah. It’s focused on the ways (social, economic and ethical) in which God is transforming the world, reversing the status quo in order to make all things new.

**Psalm 113.** notice the similarities to Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord!

Praise, O servants of the Lord;  
praise the name of the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed be the name of the Lord  
from this time on and forevermore.

<sup>3</sup> From the rising of the sun to its setting  
the name of the Lord is to be praised.

<sup>4</sup> The Lord is high above all nations,  
and his glory above the heavens.

<sup>5</sup> Who is like the Lord our God,  
who is seated on high,

<sup>6</sup> who looks far down  
on the heavens and the earth?

<sup>7</sup> He raises the poor from the dust,  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

<sup>8</sup> to make them sit with princes,  
with the princes of his people.

<sup>9</sup> He gives the barren woman a home,  
making her the joyous mother of children.

Praise the Lord!