

Saturday 22 December

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1: 24-28; 1 Samuel 2: 1, 4-8; Luke 1: 46-56

Hannah said to Eli, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.' She left him there for the Lord.

Today, we have another account of a woman gifted with a child she had longed-for and feared she would never have. She is named—Hannah—and, interestingly, is the first person recorded in the Bible as praying silently. She is laying before God a desire so deep that it goes even beyond the words she is mouthing. Her response when the child is born is to nourish and nurture him as any mother would but then does something improbable – she takes the child and gives him back to the One who gave him to her.

- What do you make of a mother who gives her child to the Temple?
- What do you think Eli's reaction was to being given this child?

Hannah's prayer was answered—and she responded with generosity and love. Pray for a similar openness when you receive blessings.

Daily Reflections



Week beginning Sunday 16 December
(3rd Sunday of Advent Year C)

To

Saturday 22 December 2018

Sunday 16 December—Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Zephaniah 3: 14-18; Isaiah 12; Philippians 4: 4-7; Luke 3: 10-18

*The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.*

The Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday—or, in English, Rejoice Sunday! Hopefully, we find time and space to rejoice in all that God does for us—but Zephaniah offers us a different perspective. He says that rejoicing can also happen the other way round. The Lord knows that life is hard—and particularly when we try to live according to the values he lays before us. God rejoices in our small victories—in those small triumphs over evil that contribute to the sum of good in the world. This can be very encouraging when times are hard—that God is in it with us and will join us in our rejoicing when we succeed.

- What do you think God's rejoicing and being glad over us looks and sounds like?
- How does God's joy in our efforts support and encourage you in the harder tasks that might face you?

Spend some time on this Gaudete/ Rejoice Sunday pondering this image of God's joy in you. Give thanks and allow the love behind it to feed your being today.

Friday 21 December (St Peter Canisius)

Scripture: Song of Songs 2: 8-14 or Zephaniah 33: 14-15; Psalm 32(33); Luke 1: 39-45

*My beloved speaks to me and says
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.
O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.'*

The Song of Songs is a beautiful love song—a conversation in poetry between two young lovers. It is often seen as an allegory for God's relationship with the Jewish people—or between Christ and his Bride, the Church. It is worth reading on its own merits—and reminding ourselves that love and attraction are not recent inventions! But there is value also in reading it as representing that precious relationship between God and humanity. A relationship that certainly has its ups and downs from the human side but one that is founded on the total love and delight of God for his people.

- Would you expect to find this kind of passionate love poetry in the Bible?
- What does it tell us about the blessedness of human love?

Read the passage—and more of the Song of Songs if you have time. As you do, try to tune into it as an expression of God's love for humanity... and reflect on how it is in harmony (or otherwise) with your image of God.

Thursday 20 December

Scripture: Isaiah 7: 10-14; Psalm 23(24); Luke 1:26-38

The Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. .'

It is clear from what follows on from this extract that Isaiah is becoming exasperated with Ahaz. True, he is caught in a dilemma but Isaiah has spoken to him about keeping faith and is suggesting that, if he still has doubts, he should ask the Lord for a sign. At one level, it sounds good to say that he will not put the Lord to the test—on another, he could be showing his doubt even more: what if God does not respond?

Isaiah sees straight through it and says that God will take the initiative in a way that Ahaz would almost definitely not expect.

- Why do you think Ahaz was reluctant to put the Lord to the test?
- What do you think he made of God's response?

Spend a little time today reflecting on your own attitude to “putting the Lord to the test” - to “asking God for a sign”. Explore the balance in your prayer between simple trust that God will provide in all things—and a wariness of asking in case you are disappointed.

Monday 17 December

Scripture: Genesis 49: 2, 8-10; Psalm 71(72); Matthew 1: 1-17

*'Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion's whelp;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion,
like a lioness—who dares rouse him up?
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and the obedience of the peoples is his.'*

The Lion of Judah became one of the titles of the Messiah and was picked up in Revelation 5:5 as a title of Jesus. It has its origins here in this prophecy that the patriarch Jacob gave to his sons. It was, in fact, his last testament. He foresees the primacy of the tribe of Judah, his fourth son. The great King David was part of the house of Judah—and, through his line, so was Joseph and Jesus. This Reading takes us deep into the history of the Jewish people—reminding us of just how deeply Jesus' roots were embedded in the history of the people God chose to reveal his love to the world.

- Why do you think it is important to refer back to people who lived thousands of years ago in a society that has long since disappeared?
- How does the passing on of a title such as Lion of Judah add to the meaning of Jesus' birth for the Jewish people to whom he was sent—even if it was not recognised at the time.

If you have time, read the whole of [Genesis 49](#). It is not too long and gives you an insight into the relationships between fathers and sons in ancient times. If all you have heard of Jacob and his sons is from “Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” this will act as kind of sequel—but also a deeper understanding of the roles the brothers would go on to play in the founding of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Tuesday 18 December

Scripture: Jeremiah 23: 5-8; Psalm 71(72); Matthew 1: 18-24

‘The days are surely coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’

Yesterday, we heard Jacob make a prophecy about the legacy of his son, Judah. This was partially fulfilled by King David but, as Jeremiah recognised, there was more still to come. David had been a great king with many victories to his name but had also committed great sin which, it was believed, prevented his reign being all it could have been. The people began to look ahead again—to one who would come and bring perfect wisdom to his realm—in whose rule justice and righteousness would flourish to good of all his people.

- How do Jeremiah’s words express a longing that many people feel today—for justice and righteousness?
- What would it be like to live in a realm of perfect justice and righteousness with wise and loving rulers?

Pray in thanksgiving for the raising up of wise and good leaders over the course of history. Pray for places in great need of such leaders— and for the places where they are trying to overcome injustices of the past.

Wednesday 19 December

Scripture: Judges 13: 2-7, 24-25; Psalm 70,(71); Luke 1: 5-25

The woman came and told her husband, ‘A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like that of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring; I did not ask him where he came from, and he did not tell me his name; but he said to me, “You shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.”

The woman in today’s Reading is one of over 600 unnamed women in the bible, She is the first in a series of women we will hear about over the next few days whose lives were transformed by the power of God—and the birth of a longed-for but unexpected child. As we read it, we can see foreshadowings of more famous “annunciations” — though the other women we will hear about are not given the same exacting conditions. A ‘nazirite’ is someone who is consecrated to God—usually because they themselves have taken a vow. In this case, God is taking the initiative—consecrating the child to himself from the moment of his conception. The child was to be called Samson.

- Why do you think the man of God laid down such strict conditions on Samson and his mother?
- How do you think the woman’s husband (named Manoah) reacted to the news—and the conditions?

You can find more about Samson and the part he would go on to play in Jewish history [here](#). Pray today for those who long for children but who are struggling to conceive or to carry a baby to term.