

Hannah and Mary

1 Samuel 1.20-28

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It is suitable to read the story of Hannah and Samuel in the time of Christmas. There are many parallels with the Christmas story. We see two mothers who became pregnant in a miraculous way, two small boys, two suffering mothers, two only sons.

Mary herself must have seen those parallels, as she quotes liberally from the prayer of Hannah, you can read that for yourself in 1 Samuel 2, The two prayer look very similar.

Mary felt like Hannah, who in a miraculous manner became pregnant of a son.

There are parallels, and I like to point to some, but the two story are also very different at the same time.

1. Hannah gives her son to God

Hannah could not have a baby; we know how bad she felt about this, so she prayed and prayed and then God answered her prayer. That she called the boy Samuel was because the name sounds a bit like the Hebrew word for to ask, or to loan.

Hannah promised God that as soon as the boy would no longer be breastfed, she would take him to the tabernacle so that he would there serve Eli the priest and see the face of God.

When the day came to give her little boy up for serving God, Hannah also brought a bull and some flour and wine for a sacrifice to God. Just as her son was also a sacrifice to God.



The pain of the mother must have been tremendous.

‘For this child I prayed’, she said when she handed him to the priest. The Hebrew uses a term of endearment for the word ‘child’: ‘for this lad I prayed’. A young boy.

The same word ‘lad’ is used for Isaac when he is about to be sacrificed by Abraham. And it was used for Ishmael when he was on the brink of dying in the desert.



A sword must have pierced the hearts of their mothers, as Mary suffered for having her child Jesus.

But Hannah was brave and she insisted to fulfil her promise to God. She gave her son to the service of God. That was like ripping her own heart out.

As Mary's heart was one day ripped out, when Jesus as a young boy, disappeared and was found in the temple.

It is interesting to see that when Hannah hands her son over to Eli, she says that God granted her the boy, and she now lends him to the Lord. She makes a play off the name of Samuel again. He is my loan to God.

She sees her giving of Samuel to God really as a loan. She owns the boy but she allows God to use him.

2. God gives his son to us

And here we see the striking difference between Hannah and Mary, between Samuel and Jesus.

The story of Mary is not that of a woman who owns a son and then gives him to serve and face God. The opposite actually.

The story of Christmas is about God having a lad whom He gave to face us, to serve us, humans.

Israel had prayed for centuries that God would send a saviour, but Israel could not conceive that God himself would come to be born as one of us.

That sounds so crazy, does it not?

But this weird idea is the heart of our Christian faith. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven and He was incarnate from the virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit.

Mary did not lent Jesus to God; if you want to speak of a loan, God gave his own Son - part of himself - to us as a loan. And after we did not believe, did not follow, after we abused and killed the man who God had given to us, God took him back to himself - but again, that was for our benefit.

Now the child of Bethlehem for whom we did not have a place, is loving us and serving us at the right hand of God. He continually presents himself to God for your benefit, for your salvation, and He is our best intercessor ever.

The story of Christmas begins with God's great act of self giving love. He first loved us, before we loved him. He gave himself to us, before we could even think of giving ourselves to Him.

3. We give because we have first received

All we are able to give to God, is what He gave to us first. The apostle John makes this clear when He speaks of God's love, in his first letter.

"This is real love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

God loved first. God gave first. God served first.

And that is the ground on which we stand. The anchor that holds us steady. The only solid spot in the quicksand of life.

The love of God was given to us, and with that his Holy Spirit - the third party in the triad of love. His Spirit entered into your life to be God's presence with you.

And this Spirit of God, this Spirit of love, enables you to love God and to love others.

This Spirit of God enables you to give back to God what He first gave to you.

Your love, your possessions, your time, all the things in life you cherish, it was given to you by God. And it is still owned by Him. He gave us all we have, even our saviour, as a loan.

And like Hannah we say: here it is Lord. Or rather, here I am Lord. Hanna gave of herself. She gave her lad. She gave her all.

As we are to give ourselves back to the God who made us and who loved us before we loved him.

God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them.

Amen.

