

Megan Keller, I am going to need your assistance on this one. I want you to imagine that you have been tasked with finding great singers for some kind of production you are putting together. You are the producer. I come into the audition. And I sing an audition for you. So here it goes. (I sing part of a song "Prepare Ye the way of the Lord" in my glorious (NOT) voice. OK, Producer Keller. Give me your honest feedback. Would you want me in your professional choir that you are putting together?

(I am assuming that she would not want me in her choir).

Oh, man. According to Megan, I do not sing good songs. My singing does not bring joy. My singing does not bring much goodness to the world around me. My singing does not change the world for the good. What we have before us this morning, though, are two songs that do stand out before us in many ways.

These two songs are the standard by which we should judge whatever songs we sing in our lives. One of these songs is sung by Hannah and is found in the Old Testament and the second song is a song of Mary and is found in the New Testament.

The first song we have already heard read and that is the song of Hannah. Hannah's song is recorded in 1st Samuel. By the way, there is a first and Second Samuel because there was so much information to be recorded that this information had to be put on two scrolls. Hence, we have a 1st Samuel and a 2nd Samuel like we have a 1st Kings and a 2nd Kings. 1st and 2nd because two scrolls were used.

Hannah's story begins in the first chapter of 1st Samuel. Here we are introduced to a man named Elkanah who has two wives. In the Old Testament polygamy was accepted. Solomon had 700 wives. Elkanah had two wives named Hannah and Peninnah. Immediately we are told that Peninnah had children but Hannah had none.

If you have been here in worship the past few weeks you know that this theme of barren women appears several times in the scriptures. You may also know that over the past few weeks we have been looking at the stories of several women that were listed as Jesus' ancestors at the beginning of the gospel of Matthew.

We have heard the stories of Rahab, Tamar, and of Ruth. Today we are going to hear the stories of Hannah and Mary. Hannah is not an ancestor to Jesus but her story directly impacts Israel's story and, hence, Jesus' story.

Again, we are told that Hannah is without children. Like I have shared over the past few weeks, for a woman to be without children, particularly male children, placed her at the bottom of the economic ladder. Today we know that there are several factors that play into not being able to have children. It happens. In the Old and New Testament times, out of their ignorance however, the women who could not have children were blamed and seen as less than.

Hannah gets picked on by the other wife, Peninnah. The text says that Peninnah irritates Hannah to no end. But the text also says that Hannah is loved by her husband so much that he gives her special privileges. Her name even means "attractive" and "charming." Listen to what her husband says to her.

Read I Samuel 1:7-8

So Hannah prays to God to allow her to have a child. She says to God that if she has a child that she will dedicate this child to God. She prays so hard, in fact, that the priest mistakenly thinks that she is drunk. Hannah continues to pray and worship God and in time she becomes pregnant. This son that she gives birth to is Samuel. Samuel becomes the person that helps Israel transition from tribal leadership to having a king.

After giving birth to Samuel, Hannah sings a song. This song is recorded in the 2nd chapter of 1st Samuel. Hannah's song is one of 4 songs that are found in the Bible that are placed in the voices of women. As we heard read earlier, Hannah sings a song of great joy at how the Lord delivers her from feeling empty.

But this song that Hannah sings is not just about Hannah becoming pregnant. Hannah also sings in this song words describing God upsetting the status quo. In this song that Hannah sings, the bows of the mighty are broken. The feeble are granted strength. Those who are hungry become fat, the poor and needy are raised out of the dust, and the barren bear children. The feet of the faithful will be protected and the adversaries of God will be scattered.

Keep this song of Hannah in your head as we now turn to the New Testament. The song we are about to read is commonly called "the Magnificat." It is called the "Magnificat" from the Latin translation of the word translated "magnifies" in the version of the Bible we will be reading. The Magnificat is also the basis for Handel's Messiah which you may have heard sung.

This song is sung by Mary after she has been told by the angel that she will also move from barrenness to becoming pregnant. But the child she will carry will be no ordinary child. The child she will carry will be the Son of God. She receives this news from the angel and then she spends time with her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth was another barren woman who in her old age becomes pregnant with the child who will be called John the Baptist.

As we read this song of Mary, pay attention to how closely it aligns with the earlier words we read from Hannah. In fact, many Biblical scholars think that Mary's song is patterned after Hannah's song. Listen carefully for the similarities between the different songs.

Read Luke 1:46-55

Mary also sings of how God is in the business of reversal. According to this song sung by Mary, God scatters the proud. God brings down the powerful from their thrones and God lifts up the lowly. God fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty.

So what do these songs mean for us today? Remember who both Hannah and Mary lift up in their songs. Is it the ones with great pride? No, they are scattered. Is it the powerful? No, they are brought down from their thrones. Is it the rich? No, they go away empty.

The ones that Mary sings about as the ones that God shows special care for are the lowly, the hungry, and the poor.

Since this is a song sung by Mary, I am going to invite us to now hear this song sung again but this time by a female artist from Ireland. As we listen to these words sung, ask yourself what you think Mary's words are saying to you and to our community.

What do her words say to the prideful, the powerful and the rich?

What do her words say to the lowly, the hungry, and the poor?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6nAsESYPiY> (1:05 – 3:30)

AMEN.

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-Given: December 14, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)