Home Service Sheet for Sunday 29th September 2024

Call to Worship 1 Samuel 1:9-11

After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, “O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your servant, Hannah and the lovely lessons we can learn from the painful episode she underwent in her life. Thank You for her example of what it is to truly trust in You and place her hope in You. Teach us to pray aright and help us to hand over every circumstance in life to You, knowing that Your way is best, and Your will is perfect. Increase our faith, we pray, and should we ever become careless in our prayer-life, bring us to that point of desperation, for You alone have the words of life. Keep us focused on You today, for we ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Hymn My hope is built by Edward Mote

<https://youtu.be/rkMapZB8qMk?si=js74ea9QE4s0R_b3>

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness

I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus’ name

On Christ the solid Rock I stand

All other ground is sinking sand

All other ground is sinking sand

When darkness hides His lovely face I rest on His unchanging grace

In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil

His oath, His covenant, His blood support me in the whelming flood

When all around my soul gives way He then is all my hope and stay

When He shall come with trumpet sound oh may I then in Him be found

Dressed in His righteousness alone faultless to stand before the throne

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, amen.

Bible Reading Luke 1:5-25

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

Reflection

In some ways it might seem a little odd for us to be looking at this reading today. We tend to expect to come across this passage in either Lent or Advent as it relates to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. However, if we are to study the Gospel as it was written then we need to take things in order. Our reading does not mention Jesus, and yet it is important to see how God brought about His plans and purposes through His servants like Elizabeth and Zechariah. Luke begins by telling us that both Zechariah and Elizabeth were from the priestly tribe of Levi, and both are described as ‘righteous’ in God’s sight.

They are further referred to as ‘walking blamelessly’ in verse 6. It’s important that we understand that this is not a claim of sinless perfection for them. Rather, it shows us that they sought to live according to God’s ways to the best of their human abilities, and put God before anything or anyone else in their lives. Luke also tells us that the couple were advanced in years and childless. For faithful Jews at this time and earlier children were seen as a great blessing given by God. To remain childless was kind of seen as second best. They had been praying that they might be blessed with a child, although we don’t know for how long.

Note when and where the angel appeared to Zechariah. It was when he was the sole priest serving in the holy of holies in the temple, behind the curtain that separated the people from the presence of God. Zechariah was shocked by the angel and afraid of him. In verse 13 the angel tells him that his prayer has been heard by God, and that a son will be born to Elizabeth and they are to name him John. Not only that, but many will rejoice at his birth (v.14), which points to this baby being someone special. The angel continues, giving Zechariah some very detailed and specific details about how John will live and what he will do in serving the Lord.

Zechariah was clearly shocked by the angel and his message. However, instead of responding with praise and thanksgiving, he asks a question and makes an excuse about why this might not happen. For this the angel rebukes Zechariah, “you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words…” (v.20) There are to be consequences for Zechariah, even though he has previously been described as a righteous man who walked blamelessly before God. Disobedience and disbelief are not what God expects from His people. He is merciful and forgiving, but sometimes we may be disciplined for our disobedience to Him so that we might learn and grow, and so that God may be glorified.

There is a marked contrast between Zechariah’s response and his wife Elizabeth’s response. After Zechariah came home, Elizabeth conceived by the natural human means. Instead of being shocked and disbelieving, though, Elizabeth speaks words of faith, showing her trust in God. “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked upon me to take away my disgrace among men.” She realises that this child is God’s doing in His perfect time. She is thankful to the Lord for removing the disgrace of her barrenness. She is a little like Hannah, the mother of Samuel, with whose story we began today.

So what are we to take away with us today from what we have read and heard? Firstly, the Lord will bring about His own purposes and plans in His own perfect timing. The angel gave some very specific details about what John was to do, and the impact this would have on the Jewish people. Zechariah disbelieved the message, but it all happened just as God said that it would. In the Scriptures there are still a number of prophecies that have not been fulfilled as yet, and visions that have not come to pass. Yet, we know that God always speaks the truth so they will happen at the right time. God’s timing is perfect!

Secondly, we are shown two examples of how people respond to God’s plans. Zechariah is a poor example, as he disbelieved God and thought that he knew better than the mighty angel God had sent to him. Elizabeth, on the other hand, accepted God’s plans for her with faith and thankfulness. As we read the Scriptures that speak of the future hope we have in Jesus Christ let us respond with faith and thankfulness because God is in control and will do what He has promised in His own perfect timing. Let us trust Him, walking in His ways day by day, amen.

Prayer of intercession

Heavenly Father, we live in a troubled and troubling world, marred by sin and selfishness. Help us keep our eyes fixed on You at all times and in all circumstances. As we have heard the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, we are reminded of those who remain childless due to barrenness or other medical issues. Be with those who sorrow because they cannot have children and grant them Your peace. We pray too for those families who struggle to care and provide for the children they have. Grant them wisdom, patience and love we pray. Lord, we pray too for Your Church and ask that You would empower us to reach out to families, couples and single folk with the good news of the Gospel, grace and peace. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Prayer of Blessing

Gracious God, keep our eyes fixed on You every moment of the day. May we place our faith and hope in You alone, and trust Your perfect timing for all things. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.