



TALKING WITH GOD

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“Hannah”

We are just about to celebrate the birth of Jesus, God coming to live among us on earth.

In 1 Samuel, chapter 1, another birth is recorded. We read of Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. The fact that Hannah's name is mentioned first may indicate that she was Elkanah's first wife. At this time in Israel (approx. 1025 BC) it was acceptable for a man to have more than one wife, and one of the reasons a man might take a second wife was if his first was unable to have children. It is probable that this was the case with Elkanah, as we read that “Hannah had no children”.

The family went up to the temple at Shiloh every year, and every year Peninnah would ridicule Hannah because of her childlessness and would make her life so miserable that Hannah was unable to eat.

It is an extremely sad situation for a woman who desperately wants a child and is unable to have one, and Hannah felt that grief in addition to having to share her husband and facing the ridicule of Peninnah. Hannah's thoughts would also have turned to her old age: in 1025 BC, there was no pension, no nursing home or hospital. One's children were one's hope for old age.

We read that, one particular year, as the family are attending Shiloh, Hannah stands in the temple crying, and, in her grief, prays to God, pleading with him for a son. It appears that this was the first time Hannah had prayed to God about her situation.

We can pray to God about everything, but how many of us are like Hannah? We live with our worry, sadness, anxiety, fear; we cry into our pillows; we speak to endless people for advice.... but somehow forget God. Hannah suffered for some years before

finally praying to God, and we read that, after she had prayed, although not knowing whether God would grant her request, she “went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer”, (v.18). In other words, she had a sense of peace.

God *did* answer Hannah’s prayer, giving her a son, Samuel. I must caution that God doesn’t always give us what we ask for. Sometimes (and sometimes we don’t understand why) he answers our prayer, but not as we want him to. But, in praying to God, we can, like Hannah, know his peace “which passes all human understanding”. Unlike Hannah, we can also know that we pray to a God who fully knows the stresses, pain and sorrow of this human life, because we know that God, in Jesus, has lived this life.

(Rev. Julia Pratt)

Doing Prayer

Sometimes it can be hard when we come to pray to know what exactly to pray for, and we might feel guilty just praying for ourselves, our family and friends.

A wise old lady I once knew, who regularly led intercessions in church, spoke of how she always had a pen and paper near her, so that, when listening to the news during the day, she could write down items that she felt inspired to pray about. This meant that, when praying at night, or when preparing intercessions for church, she could recall these people, these issues.

The Vicar in the church where I served as a Reader similarly always had a little black book in his cassock pocket on Sundays. When we were shaking hands at the church door at the end of the services (remember those days), and people told him about someone who was sick or bereaved or about any

other issue needing prayer, he would get out his book and write these names down.

I have started following this wise example - as I receive emails, WhatsApp messages, hear things during the day, I know that, come the night-time, I will have forgotten them, so I write them down in my little *blue* book. That way, despite the busyness of the day erasing so much from my brain, I have that list of people or issues to bring to God in prayer.

(J. Pratt)

Sharing Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen

(The Advent Collect from the Book of Common Prayer)

(If you would like to contribute to future issues of the Prayer Journal, please email curate@stpeters-woolton.org.uk)