

“A Bias For Love”

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1st Samuel 2:1-10

Luke 1:26-38

30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.’

Luke 1:30-31

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to see the hope you represent when you came to Earth

as a vulnerable baby born to poor parents, and have mercy upon us, too.

Amen

Do you believe in the virgin birth?

Is it necessary to believe this and still be a Christian?

In nature, it's possible to have parthenogenesis, or virgin birth,

among some species of animals – like lizards, but not mammals.

Besides the birth of Christ, there are no documented virgin births of human beings –
except a divorce case in the 1920s that involved prestige and a lot of money
yet this was before DNA tests could resolve the biological questions.

As modern people, we have learned to rely upon science and technology
for the assurance of the scientific method that there is cause and effect –
and that the world of nature makes sense.

Science is limited, though, to what can be observed
and its laws change as new data is introduced.

As modern people who are people of faith – and who want to know
if the Bible can be taken seriously to help us in life,

we must be willing to accept that truth does not always have a proof.

One way to reconcile this disparity of truth vs fact –

especially, when it comes to miracles in the Bible, is to ask the question:

Why is this story in the Bible?

Then we are not so much concerned about whether it happened or not,
but to seek to understand the significance of the event described.

As Christians we have often relied upon ‘proof-texting’ by making comparisons
between events in the New Testament – or New Covenant,
with the Older Testament of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Our lesson from 1st Samuel refers to an Israelite woman named Hannah,
who was one of two wives of a man whose first wife bore him children
though Hannah could not.

She prayed to God and her priest, Eli, assured her God would answer her prayers.

Sure enough – after intercourse with her husband, she became pregnant.

Her joy was expressed in what we now call ‘Hannah’s Song’.

Willard, p.2

There are parallels between Hannah's song and Mary's Song, called the Magnificat.

46 And Mary said,

*"My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.*

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;

*49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

*50 And his mercy is on those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

*51 He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,*

*52 he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;*

*53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.*

54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

Both songs begin with praise and joy for God

and both speak of the reversal of powers for the sake of justice.

Hannah's Song is a little harsher on her 'enemies' –

perhaps reflecting the abuse she endured from the other wife.

However the central theme is that God is an advocate of the poor and justice will prevail.

Hannah's son grew up to be the prophet Samuel,

who would guide Israel as it sought to become a mighty nation

and anoint Israel's first king, Saul.

Mary's son, Jesus, would grow up to be a teacher, healer, and wonderworker

whom his followers would call the 'Son of God'.

Therefore, we can see Mary's Song in light of Hannah's Song,

but with a *universal* perspective that

God is a God of justice and compassion – of salvation for all.

So, by linking the Christian story with the Hebrew tradition,

is the case made to believe in the virgin birth?

Is it necessary to believe this and still be a Christian?

That depends on our bias, I believe.

Don't we all have a bias?

Don't we all have a perspective and a point of view?

We hear a lot about the negative forms of bias –

with regards to race, politics, and gender.

Still there is a healthy bias we need to maintain – a bias of love.

Willard, p.3

Such a bias seeks understanding with those with whom you disagree –
if not compliance with what they say.

It means not settling for the letter of the law,
but to find a qualitative answer you can live with.

If we enter all the big questions in life from a purely intellectual,
analytical point of view, then we are going to miss a lot of information –
like the difference it makes when you know somebody,
when you know those who are involved in those big questions.

So, do you believe in the virgin birth?

Is it necessary to believe this and still be a Christian?

For centuries Christians have taught generation after generation
the story of how God came to Earth
as a vulnerable baby born into a poor family.

Whether it happened that way or not,
interpreting this story with a bias for love would see
the hope of people of all times and every place.

It means God spoke to human beings in the language
of hope for the future that a baby represents.

It means Jesus is connected not only to the hope that the human race goes on,
but the hope for new life, abundant life, authentic life
of forgiveness and love over and against poverty and oppression.

It means God is not a dispassionate judge demanding obedience,
but God is biased for the sake of humanity – for our sake, with a Spirit of love.

That is... if you believe in that kind of thing.

Amen

*Our lesson today from 1st Samuel 2:1-10 is called “The Song of Hannah”
and is a prayer of praise by a woman who previously had no children,
but at last learns she is carrying a child.
Like Mary’s “Magnificat”, Hannah proclaims God
as the champion of the powerless, who reverses the fortunes of the arrogant...*

^{2:1}Then Hannah prayed:

My heart rejoices in the LORD. My strength^(a) rises up in the LORD!
My mouth mocks my enemies because I rejoice in your deliverance.

²No one is holy like the LORD— no, no one except you!
There is no rock like our God!

³Don’t go on and on, talking so proudly, spouting arrogance from your mouth,
because the LORD is the God who knows, and he weighs every act.

⁴The bows of mighty warriors are shattered,
but those who were stumbling now dress themselves in power!

⁵Those who were filled full now sell themselves for bread,
but the ones who were starving are now fat from food!
The woman who was barren has birthed seven children,
but the mother with many sons has lost them all!

⁶The LORD! He brings death, gives life, takes down to the grave, and raises up!
⁷The LORD! He makes poor, gives wealth, brings low, but also lifts up high!

⁸God raises the poor from the dust, lifts up the needy from the garbage pile.
God sits them with officials, gives them the seat of honor!

The pillars of the earth belong to the LORD; he set the world on top of them!
⁹God guards the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked die in darkness
because no one succeeds by strength alone.

¹⁰The LORD! His enemies are terrified! God thunders against them from heaven!
The LORD! He judges the far corners of the earth!

May God give strength to his king
and raise high the strength of his anointed one.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words.

Luke 1:26-38

- ²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God
to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,
²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph,
of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.
- ²⁸ And he came to her and said,
"Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"
- ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying,
and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.
- ³⁰ And the angel said to her,
"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall call his name Jesus.
³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;
and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,
³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
and of his kingdom there will be no end."
- ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel,
"How shall this be, since I have no husband?"
- ³⁵ And the angel said to her,
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born will be called holy,
the Son of God.
³⁶ And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age
has also conceived a son;
and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.
³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible."
- ³⁸ And Mary said,
"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me according to your word."
And the angel departed from her.

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country,
to a city of Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechari'ah
and greeted Elizabeth.

41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb;
and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42
and she exclaimed with a loud cry,
“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!
43 And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord
should come to me?
44 For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears,
the babe in my womb leaped for joy.
45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment
of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

46 And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is on those who fear him
from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
52 he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.