

“The Birth of a Deliverer”

12 December 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Lighting of the Advent Candles

Hymn: Joy to the World

Reading: Judges 13:1-25

Sermon:

All of us have undoubtedly received many cards, and packages from the postman this Christmas and they are an example of a deliverer. Or better perhaps is the midwife who delivers your baby. Today's sermon is about the birth of a boy destined to be a deliverer. (v5) *“you will conceive and give birth to a son...he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines”* In fact the idea of delivery is found in different aspects of today's story in Judges Ch 13. There is the delivery of the people of Israel into the hands of the Philistines because of their evil behaviour in God's eyes. (v1) There is the delivery of a message of a birth to a couple who cannot have children by the angel of the Lord. (v3) There is the delivery of a child who is called Samson who was blessed by God and stirred by the Holy Spirit. (v24-25) The theme of delivery, deliverance and deliverer is at the heart of this story.

I. Israel's need for deliverance

The people of Israel have had a couple of great leaders Moses who led them from Egypt to the promised land through the Red Sea and the wilderness and Joshua who led them into the promised land of Canaan and settled them there. The early chapters of Judges start out well Ch 2:7 *“The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel.”* Sadly, however, within a single generation we read, (v10-11) *“After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals.”* The Baals were the gods of the surrounding nations.

Their behaviour *“provoked the Lord to anger. In his anger against Israel the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them,..... they were no longer able to resist. They were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up judges (leaders, deliverers) who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.”* (v14-16)

This pattern was repeated, *“whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived....but when the judge died the people returned to ways even more corrupt....therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and said, “I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations*

Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did.”

These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites, the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians and the Hivites.....they took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.”

Therefore, within a single generation, God is forgotten, his ways are ignored, and his people align themselves with other gods and their practices. Considering the covenant promise God had made with Israel and their acceptance of it, such ignorance of and disobedience towards God deserved his righteous anger and punishment. He simply gave them over to the other nations as he had promised he would do in his covenant with them and as a result they were in distress and in need of a deliverer. In this period of their history there were twelve judges or deliverers, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon and Samson.

II. The announcement of a deliverer (v1-5)

A. Comfortable in sin and weakness

So, the Israelites did evil in God's eyes, they worshipped other gods and got comfortable in their culture. They were judged and punished and lived under their rule and then a process of deliverance begins. (v2) However there is something missing in v1 that was present with most of the other judges (3:9, 15, 4:3, 6:6-7, 10:10) that is the people have no sense of distress, urgency or vision that it should be any different from the present reality, they do not cry out, they are prayerless and simply accept the reality of God's punishment. They had become used to being ruled by the Philistines and they get really upset when Samson fights the Philistines (15:11) he had upset the status quo, he had annoyed their enemies.

I wonder if you like me feel uncomfortable with this description of the church. Comfortable with the world, connected to the world, dominated by the world and upset if anyone dares to question the world on what it believes and how it does things. Are we not people who keep our heads down, who rarely speak against obvious evils, who do not challenge ungodly behaviour and who do not wrestle with God in prayer about sin in our lives and in the church? Have we become a people who have no sense of need, anger or disappointment at the lack of love for God in our lives in the church and society and have simply succumbed and gotten used to the way things are? The compromise was ingrained! Folks it should not be this way, Samson uncomfortably reminds us of this.

B. The grace of Gods' initiative.

God was not surprised by this; in fact, it highlights again his wonderful grace. Moses had warned Joshua that this would happen, Deuteronomy Ch 31:16 *“these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them.”* For God to have this knowledge of his peoples unfaithfulness for him to take the initiative in their salvation, is simply wonderful, he had planned to deliver a deliverer to an unfaithful people, who committed themselves to other gods and a complacent people soft on sin and so

God is at the very heart of the announcement of the deliverer Samson would really shake things up.

C. The strangeness of Gods' way

Manoah and his wife: obscure and hopeless.

I know that people get annoyed when a husband keeps talking about his wife and never uses her name. In this bible narrative we are introduced to an obscure man who lived in Zorah in Dan called Manoah who had a wife. The narrator doesn't use her name, the angel of the Lord doesn't use her name and Manoah doesn't use her name and we do not know her name. Added to this she is addressed twice as sterile and childless! She is anonymous, barren and together they are in a hopeless position. This is the way God works, he came when he wasn't asked, he chose a hopeless couple to bear his deliverer, and he speaks directly to the anonymous Manoah's wife giving her the most amazing news about conceiving a son.

They were chosen, they were dead in terms of having children, hopeless in terms of providing salvation and yet God in his grace chose them, and worked a wonderful miracle within them, so that a new and special life was produced within Manoah's wife. The ways of God are strange to us, but the glory belongs entirely to him.

Paul reminded the church members in Ephesus that they too started their life with God in a similarly hopeless place, telling them, *"you were dead in your transgressions and sins objects of his anger but because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved"*. (Ephesians Ch 2:1-5)

It also reminds us of another announcement of another child to be born to another woman plucked from obscurity and who had no possibility of being pregnant yet is told by an angel of the Lord that she will also have a boy who will be the saviour of the world. What Samson began; Jesus completed through his death. (You should this afternoon read the remaining chapters of Samsons story, in Judges Chapters 14-16, it is an incredible read and it ends as some of you will know with Samson's death in a self-sacrificial way.)

Manoah and his wife cannot contribute

As the story unfolds Manoah is not allowed to provide for the angel who brings the message, he is not allowed to give him food but instead must offer it as a sacrifice, and he is not even allowed to know his name because it would be too wonderful, beyond understanding. (v15-18) The word wonderful is the same one used in Psalm 139:6 where the Psalmist is overwhelmed by the knowledge God has of him, seeing and knowing everything about his life. He confirms how wonderful he is by ascending in the flame of the sacrifice. The pointers to Jesus from the Angel of the Lord in this story are very clear and straightforward.

We cannot assist God in our salvation or deliverance, it is all of him. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not by works so that no-one can boast."* Ephesians Ch 2:8-9

The angel is called, Wonderful, the name given to God in Psalm 139 and by Isaiah to the promised Messiah. Isaiah 9:6 *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and*

the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called, Wonderful, counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”. Acts 4:12

III. The encouraging response of Manoah and his wife

I was impressed by Manoah and his wife and their response here are some of the things recorded of their response to Gods strange ways and his unwillingness to let them participate. There is much to commend them as a couple.

- A. **Faith:** Manoah and his wife believe the angel of the Lord. Manoah’s wife tells her husband without scepticism about the meeting that had occurred describing it as accurately as she could. Manoah accepts all she says and pleads with the Lord asking for help in how to bring up the boy who is to be born. As the story is told they always believe even if there is a sense in Manoah’s prayer that he is also seeking confirmation of its truth. Their faith is commendable as a gift from God.
- B. **Prayer:** Throughout the process of coming to terms with the announcement they are in dialogue with the Lord. (v8, v11, 15) and at each point they come to a better understanding of who it is they are speaking with and of the reality of what they were being asked to do. Their prayer life is commendable and an incredible gift of God that is the key to a good and healthy life as a disciple of the Lord.
- C. **Reverence:** Both Manoah’s wife (v6) and Manoah (v22) are struck by the awesome, scariness of dealing with God. Gideon had felt a similar fear and dread (6:22) when he met the angel of the Lord. Moses was told that no-one can see God and live (Ex 33:20) which is the truth behind Manoah’s fear in v22. The reverence, the fear of the Lord, the reality that God is awesome and separate and supernatural is something we need to understand if we are to approach him in a proper manner. Before a Holy God we bow to worship, we submit in humility, we obey in reverence that is our only correct response. Their reverence is commendable.
- D. **Assurance:** BUT it is not the whole story, because Manoah’s wife speaks the truth when she said that God would have killed them by now, had he not initiated the contact and shared the news of the birth of the boy and accepted their sacrifice of a burnt offering and a grain offering. Her logic is solid he wouldn’t have done all this if he had meant to kill them. God graciously allows the relationship, he initiated it, he set its limits, and accepted the sacrifice they offered in grateful thanks, and they are allowed access and encouraged to dialogue and walk with God in their lives. They are assured of the graciousness of God and their assurance is correct and commendable.

For us Peter tells us, *“For Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.”* 1Peter 3:18

The writer of Hebrews says, *“Therefore brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most Holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is his body, and since we have a great High Priest who is over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty*

conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful.

So, *“we serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.”* Psalm 2:11

Manoah and his wife’s response is an encouragement for us to do the same, before the Lord, have faith, be prayerful, worship in reverence and approach with assurance.

IV. The birth of the deliverer: Samson

Samson is a Nazirite boy, *“the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth,”* The rules for a Nazirite were set out in Numbers Ch 6 and the guidelines included, no alcohol, no touching of dead things and no cutting of his hair from birth.

The purpose of his life is to be Israel’s deliverer from their enemies the Philistines. *“and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”* Please read the next three chapters 14-16 to hear the account of how he did. Most of you will know something of his life which is fascinating and tragic, ending in his death.

Samson is the only judge to be given a nativity story. He ruled Israel for twenty years and fought the Philistines when others just lived with them. He was deeply flawed which underlines the strangeness of Gods ways and he simply began the deliverance that culminated in another announcement made through the angel of the Lord of the birth of very special boy, set apart from birth, conceived by the Holy Spirit, who unlike Samson did not sin or murder, and who completed what Samson began the deliverance of Gods people through his own sacrificial death on a cross. *“The righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God.”* Samson began the deliverance, but Jesus is the true deliverer, our response should be as Manoah and his wife, believe with faith, relate through prayer and serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Praise: I Will Offer Up My Life

Announcements

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Benediction

Discussion Questions:

What was the evil the Israelites did in the sight of the Lord?

What similarities can you trace in Samson’s birth and Jesus’ birth?

Manoah’s wife’s name is never mentioned by anyone in the story. What might be the significance of this?

Manoah is fearful of meeting with God (v.22). Why should we be similarly fearful? What assurance can we have, like Manoah’s wife?