

MOTHER'S DAY 2020

Sermon material compiled by The Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Bayfield, May 10, 2020
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Today is Mother's Day. I thought, I can begin the sermon with the only toast that I know. "Here's to the younger years of my life, spent in the arms of another man's wife, my mother!"

I looked up "Mother" in the Encyclopedia Britannica thinking I would find several outstanding women whom I could use as examples for mothers in the sermon, and I found only three articles. *Mother Church*, *Mother goddess*, and *Mother Goose*.

Mother Church is the designation used by Christian Scientists for the original Boston church established by Mary Baker Eddy, also known as the first Church of Christ Scientist. As interesting as that might be, I don't think it's what most of you want to learn about when we're thinking about mothers and Mother's Day.

The next mother article, *Mother Goose* is a fictitious old woman, reputedly the source of the body of traditional children's songs and verses known as nursery rhymes. Now my mother did read to me many children's songs and verses. That's relevant, but the article goes on to describe *Mother Goose*, as "a beak-nosed sharp chinned granny who rode on the back of a flying gander." My mother was not beak nosed. My mother did fly at the beach of Atlantic City, New Jersey on one of those early airplanes, which was largely 2 x 4 struts covered in canvass with an engine like the Wright Brothers made. She described laying down on the wing opposite the pilot on the other side of the engine and holding on for dear life, but she never flew on a flying gander like Mother Goose. I don't think Mother Goose is a good illustration for Mother's Day.

The only other article I found about mother, *Mother goddess*, I learned is any variety of feminine deities and maternal symbols of creativity, birth, fertility, sexual union, nurturing and cycle of growth. The term also has been applied to figures as diverse as Stone Age Venuses and the Virgin Mary.

Mary, now she has possibilities.¹ We can focus on the two mother's in the New Testament who are closest to Jesus Christ. Mary is the mother of Jesus and Elizabeth her cousin is the mother of John the Baptist.

Since this is Mother's Day, I decided to change the lessons from the readings for the 5th Sunday after Easter, the stoning of Stephen and the introduction of Paul²; Jesus the cornerstone³; and Jesus announcing His leaving the disciples and His many dwelling places.⁴

It seems that the lessons for *The Visitation* are more appropriate. By making this change, we are doing what Christians have done centuries ago. We are taking a secular festival day, "*Mother's Day*" and giving the day religious meaning with the lessons from "*The Visitation*."

In these lessons, the Old Testament Lesson, I Samuel, is used. Hannah is married to Elkanah. It was the time when men could have more than one wife, and Elkanah was also married to Peninnah. Peninnah was a mother, she had children, but Hannah had no children. Every year Elkanah went up from his home city of Ramatha'-im-zo'phim in the hill

¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica; Volume 8, Micropedia; University of Chicago, 1987, page 361*

² Acts 7:55-60

³ I Peter 2:2-10

⁴ John 14:1-14

country of Ephraim to worship and to offer sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh. On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give large portions of the meat to Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters so they could also sacrifice.

But although Elkanah loved Hannah, he would give her only one small portion to sacrifice, because the Lord had closed her womb and she had no children. Hannah's rival half-sister teased and provoked her sorely because she had no children. We are told this taunting went on year after year.

Here in the Bible is an example meanness. It's a terrible thing when couples who want to have children cannot have them.

Hannah wept and would not eat. Elkanah, asked her why she would not eat, why she wept, why she was so sad? Was he not more to her than ten sons? Hannah was a devout woman, near the priest Eli. Deeply distressed, she prayed unceasingly to the Lord for a son. If God would only give her a son, she promised she would dedicate him to the Lord, to serve as a Priest.

In time, Elkanah knew his wife Hannah. The Lord remembered Hannah and they produced a son. She called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord." Gesenius, a great Hebrew scholar says Samuel's name means, "the Name of God." Samuel would go on to become a great prophet of Israel. The people demanded a king. To the Priest Samuel the idea of a King was an anathema. Yahweh was the only King of Israel. However, Samuel eventually yielded to popular demand and anointed both Saul and David as Kings of Israel.⁵

⁵ The Interpreter's Bible Volume II; Abingdon Press: New York, 1987
1 Samuel 1:1-2:10 pgs. 876-88

Today there are clinics to help people have children. Even adoption can be hard, Someone said children come from one of two ways- some come from the belly and some come from the heart. I would hope all children would come from the heart. Adoption is a wonderful thing.

The Letter from Paul to the Romans is very fitting for Mother's Day. The most important thing we can thank our mother's for is for their love, standing by their children.

There was a young boy eleven years old who contracted an illness that was so severe the doctors could not agree on a diagnosis. It was either polio and rheumatic fever, or scarlet fever. The boy could not walk, he had heart problems, and fever. The doctor's gave him so many needles, one day he didn't care whether he lived or died. He was in the hospital for about six months. It was during the war. The only beds available were in the maternity ward, so a lot of new mothers were on the same floor. Every day his mother read to him, sea stories, the whole series of Horatio Hornblower. They played cards. He read the Bible and they had prayers. His priest came to visit and they shared the Lord's prayer and a prayer for healing. Finally, he got well enough to go home.

His mother was the den mother for the cub scouts, and they brought the boy to the meetings, going down the stairs with a scout holding the bot-tom legs and another scout holding the top of the chair. The boy rode to the meetings, sitting in the chair. It was wonderful having the fellowship of the boys. In time, the boy got strong enough and learned to walk again. His mother was there for him every day.

St. Paul's Letter to the Romans could have been written about the love and advice the boy's parents gave to the child. Paul said, "Let love be

genuine; hate what is evil.” The whole family hated that sickness. “Hold fast to what is good. Love one another, outdo one another in showing honor...Rejoice in hope....Weep with those who weep.”⁶ The boy’s best friend died while he was in the hospital. The boy and his mother both wept. There was great harmony and care for others less fortunate in that family.

The Gospel from Luke⁷ is a story about motherhood! Mary goes out to a Judean town in the hill country. She goes in the house of Zechariah and greets her cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth is pregnant and at the sound of Mary’s greeting, John the Baptist “to be” leapt in Elizabeth’s womb. John the Baptist was making a fuss even before he was born. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. She cries out about Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Elizabeth recognizes that Mary is pregnant. She asks, “Why has the mother of the Lord come to me?.....And blessed is she who believed there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her by her Lord.” Mary is also pregnant with Jesus. This is in classical terms The Visitation.

Mary responds with the beautiful song that has been called *The Magnificat*.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on, all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has

⁶ Revised Common Lectionary; Episcopal Edition, Church Publishing Inc., New York, 2007 pg. 511

⁷ *ibid.* Episcopal Lectionary: Luke 1:39-57

done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”⁸

Mary remained with Elizabeth for about three months, during which time Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist, the herald for Jesus. In due time, Mary, the favored One gave birth to Jesus. Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Holy One. Jesus is God’s only Son.⁹ Jesus as Lord and Master, brings God and all humankind together through God’s Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of the Lord Amen.

⁸ The *Magnificat* : The Song of our Lord’s mother has been used as a canticle in the Church’s worship from at least the fourth century, if not earlier. In his combination of the elements from the Vespers and Compline services of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the monasteries in Gaul of St. Benedict, the Roman Catholic Churches, Archbishop Cranmer in compiling the first Prayer Book for the Anglican Communion placed the canticle the *Magnificat* fittingly in a position where it links the Old and New Testament lessons. The *Magnificat* is the loveliest flower of Hebrew Messianic poetry, blossoming on the eve of the Incarnation. Its direct model was the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel. 2:1-10), but its several phrases are a mosaic of allusion and quotation of the whole range of the Old Testament. It could only have been composed by one who was intimately conversant with the Scriptures and in perfect concord with its piety and aspiration. It sums up the hope of the lowly and meek, the hungry and poor, for the redemptive fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. In addition, ‘its simple faith, its joyful hope, its humble gratitude and its calm submission bear eloquent testimony to the character and spirit of her who was chosen to be the mother of the Lord.’; Massey H. Shepherd, Jr.: *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*; Oxford University Press, New York, 1959 pg.26

⁹ The Greek word for “son” is u’os, who at that time was traditionally known as the one who carried out the vocation of the father in the world.