

GOSPEL MESSAGE

December 26, 2021

FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

Obedience and Praise

The act of praising God fairly leaps off the page in today's readings. And hand in hand with that joyful response is the practice of obedience. They can seem to be opposing actions; we tend to think of praise as a spontaneous eruption of joy, while obedience puts us in mind of rules and limits that dampen our fun. In God's world, though, obedience and praise are naturally joined.

The boy Samuel is in the temple because of a vow his mother, Hannah, made to God. It is her obedience that places him in that sacred space. And each year, Eli the priest blesses Hannah and her husband, Elkanah, praying for the formerly barren couple to have children. And they do!

In the gospel reading from Luke, the boy Jesus can also be found in the temple, after a frantic search by his parents. Mary and Joseph do not understand why he would be in the temple, and Jesus does not understand why his parents did not think to look there first: he is, after all, in his Father's house because of obedience to his life's work. After the misunderstanding, though, Jesus "went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). Mary too is full of praise as she sees her son's obedience to his call and identity from God.

Far from being the fun-spoiler, obedience leads us to praise. When we let our words and actions point toward God, we will find reasons for praise on every side. And Paul's words to the Colossians bring home the startling realization that obedience is our glad foundation: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful" (Colossians 3:15). It turns out our greatest joy comes from following God's guidance.

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