

DECEMBER 22 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

As we draw close to Christmas, the scripture draws our attention to God's divine intervention in the miraculous conception and birth stories of Samuel and John the Baptist.

As we see Samuel and John the Baptist's lives unfold, it becomes abundantly clear that their mission served to fulfil God's plan of salvation, which would find its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Samuel became a prophet who ushered the people of God from turbulent times of the judges to forming them as a nation—initially, Saul as their king, and later replaced with David as their king.

John the Baptist, in the same way, helped to prepare the way of the Lord by calling God's people to repentance and reform their lives to be ready for the coming of Christ.

As I reflected on today's readings, I couldn't help but see similarities between Hannah and Elizabeth. So let's take a closer look at their stories. Both of them were barren. In an era where women were primarily valued for their ability to bear children, they would have both faced significant social stigma, especially shame and disgrace.

Hannah was deeply troubled because not only was she unable to have children, she was also being mocked by her husband's other wife. She felt hopeless, broken, and deeply humiliated. Despite her husband's love and attention, Hannah could not be consoled. So Hannah turned to God, weeping. She prayed that if God would give her a son, then she would offer her son back to God to serve Him. When she was falsely accused of being drunk, she poured out her heart and told priest Eli that she was praying out of great anguish and sorrow. Eli assured her and gave her a

blessing, and she left with hope. God spoke through His servant Eli, and Hannah believed and trusted in God's promise.

In the same way, Elizabeth, who was also childless and advanced in years, prayed to God for many years with her husband Zechariah for a child. One important detail about Elizabeth was that in addition to her being barren, she was also past the childbearing age. But Elizabeth and Zechariah never gave up their hope and continued to pray and relied on God's ability to give them a child. We are told that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was on duty as a priest in the temple, and told him, "God has heard your prayer. Your wife Elizabeth will give you a son."

When Hannah and Elizabeth experienced desperation, they didn't abandon their faith or give up hope. Instead, they learned to rely on God by surrendering to God's will. Instead of learning to surrender to God, I find it easier to make plans first and then ask God to just rubber stamp them. While I make plans first but leave a tiny bit of room for God to give His input. I do this because my life feels more comfortable and safer when I am in charge. But whenever things don't turn out to my liking, I feel disappointed. I am sure we are all familiar with this.

When we are disappointed with God's answer or lack of it, we can become impatient, and even bitter and angry about the situation. And those negative emotions can often be directed at God. As an introvert, I often catch myself being polite and reserved. When I get to know someone and my friendship with that person grows, only then do I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and opinions and being transparent with my emotions. The ability to be honest and to have uncomfortable but necessary conversation at times takes a certain maturity and trust.

But when we become honest and transparent, that's when our relationship grows. And it's the same with us and God.

When we learn to trust God and we learn to have an honest conversation with God, and most importantly, when we learn to listen and follow God's lead, that's when our faith matures. I find that in everything God does, there is always a reason. Either God is challenging us to grow, or He is preparing us for a mission.

I remember back in 2016, Alexi Pappas, who competed in the 1,000 metre race for Greece, breaking the national record and a personal best, said in an interview, "When you are pursuing a difficult goal like training for the Olympics, one third of the time, you feel great. One third, mediocre. And one third, terrible." This is known as the rule of thirds—one third of good days, one third of okay days, and one third of bad days.

On our good days, you get good results. And that makes you feel great, and you're on top of the world. On your okay days, you are grinding through day by day, neither good nor bad, simply continuing to move forward. And then there are bad days where you struggle and feel weak and you feel like a failure and your dream seems impossible. Going through the mixture of those good, okay, and bad days is not only okay, but also necessary. On good days, we make breakthroughs precisely because we stuck through the okay and the bad days without giving up.

We hone our skills during our training and exercise, and not at the arena on our game day. Strength and skills weren't built on the battlefield, but before combat, through rigorous training, discipline, and preparation. Both Hannah and Elizabeth allowed their desperate circumstances to shape them, and nurture their faith and hope. In the same way, if we

cooperate with God, our present circumstances will help us to shape us, enabling us to fulfil God-given mission and His will.

While it is very tempting for us to want to take control of our lives and fix all our problems, let us leave room for God to intervene. Even better than that would be to learn to rely on God and willing to go with God's plan instead of our own. So what are you struggling with today? And where do you think God is leading you?