

CHRISTMAS: RECEIVING GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE

First Sunday after Christmas

December 27, 2009

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Psalm 148

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:41-52

From the Mouth of Babes

More Cheese Sauce

Sitting in his highchair at dinner one evening, our 3-year-old grandson, Jonny, kept asking for more “cheese-sauce.” Grandma Mary assured Jonny, “There is no cheese sauce on the table. It’s just meat loaf and mashed potatoes.

“No, grandma, more cheese sauce,” Jonny kept repeating.

Later that evening, when Jonny’s parents picked him up, Grandma explained that Jonny had begged for cheese sauce at dinner and she did not know what to do.

“Hmmm,” said Dave, Jonny’s dad. “What blessing did you say over the food?”

“The one we always say,” said grandma, “Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts.”

“Ah, that’s the problem, said Jenny, Jonny’s mom. “We always say, ‘Thank you, Jesus, for the food.’ Jonny wanted more ‘cheese sauce’ – more Jesus!”

The Boy Samuel: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Children draw close to God in ways that we adults can’t always predict. One of the readings for this Sunday (1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26) explains such a case. Hannah and Elkanah, the parents of a “miracle” child, the future prophet Samuel, made a heart-wrenching sacrifice so that Samuel could draw close to God. They gave up their precious infant son to the service of the LORD, placing him in the care of the priest Eli at the sacred shrine near Shiloh. Intimacy with God was the result: “The boy Samuel continued to grow and to gain favor both with the LORD and with people” (verse 26, *GNT*).

The Boy Jesus: Luke 2:41-52

Many generations later, another set of parents, Mary and Joseph, took their “miracle” child, Jesus, to a sacred site, the Jerusalem temple. It was the holy time of Passover. Mary and Joseph celebrated the feast day, and then set out for home, only to discover on the way that they had forgotten Jesus! Frantically searching for their child, they found him after three days—safely ensconced in the temple, grilling learned teachers on points of

the Jewish law. If Mary and Joseph expected Jesus to be grateful for finding him, they were wrong. Jesus rebuffed his parents: “Why did you have to look for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (verse 49, *GNT*)

Children Praising God: Psalm 148

One of the dictionary definitions for “praise” is human admiration and approval of something.” Psalm 148, one of the most beloved psalms of praise in the Hebrew Bible, brims with praiseful shouts. It stretches praise to include not just human admiration, in this case, for God, but the approval of everything God created—the heavens, the angels, the sun, the moon, the shining stars, sea monsters, hills, and mountains. No surprise, then, that this psalm knows about children praising God: “Praise him...young women and young men, old people and children too” (verse 11, *GNT*). We can stretch this definition even more. The parental sacrifices of Hannah and Elkanah, Mary and Joseph; the linen that the boy Samuel wore in the Shiloh shrine; and the dogged questions of Jesus in the temple—those are all shouts of praise in their own right.

Children Leading Us to God: Colossians 3:12-17

Children embody the new life that God has given us in Christ. Whether they are looking for more “cheese sauce,” wearing linen clothes in a sacred shrine, confounding adults with tough questions, or simply exhibiting a peace that come from unconditional love and acceptance, children point us toward God. As we watch them come to God without filters, conditions, alloys, or encumbrances, we are reminded that children set for us the goals that Colossians spells out: “...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another...And to all these qualities add love...” (verses 12-14, *GNT*).

More Cheese-us

A few days after dinner at grandma’s house, Jonny’s 18-month-old sister, Ema, was standing in front of an open refrigerator, taking food items off the shelves. Her mother bent down and asked Ema what she was looking for.

“Hungry,” was Ema’s answer. “Where’s cheese-us?”

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Robert Hodgson, Jr., Ph.D., Dean Emeritus of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at the American Bible Society.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Cameroon –

With thanks to God for the launch of the Guiziga and Bulu Bibles and for the funding for the literacy program among Mousgoum speakers, and with prayers for *the Faith Comes By Hearing*, HIV/AIDS, and women’s programs, for good relations with the Churches, and for political and social stability in the country, and that Bible work become firmly established in Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome, and Principe; **Gabon** – With thanks to God for good progress with the Nzebi translation project and for the recording of the Nzebi New Testament as part of the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program, and for the *Good Samaritan* program, and with prayers that issues will be resolved concerning the Bible

Society's premises, that the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program will become firmly established, and for the ability to increase fundraising; **Cote d'Ivoire** – With prayers for a return to lasting peace and political stability in the country inasmuch as political instability has seriously affected Bible work over recent years, and with prayers for projects among specific audiences and a commitment to God for distribution and translation work and for the ability to extend fundraising and distribution work to the entire country, and with thanks to God for the completion of the Cebara and Tabgana Bibles and with prayers that they will be printed soon.

Activity Corner: “Praise the LORD” Montage

Supplies needed: Bible; poster board; old magazines; scissors; glue or paste; marker.

Read Psalm 148. This psalm is a hymn that calls the entire creation to join in praising the LORD. Discuss all the parts of creation, both in heaven and on earth, that are mentioned in this psalm. Across the top of the poster board, write “All Creation Praises the LORD.” Then look for pictures that depict the various parts of creation mentioned in the psalm; in particular look for pictures of people of all ages, especially children, and of various races and ethnicities, and create a montage. Conclude by singing “Praise, the Lord! Ye Heavens, Adore Him” or one of your favorite praise hymns, and by praying a prayer of thanks and praise that incorporates the various pictures in the montage.