

1

How many of you enjoy making music or listening to music? Music is such an integral part of our lives, but lately it's been hard to sing with gusto, ever since we learned that the coronavirus spreads from droplets as we sneeze, cough, or project our voices through song. That's put a damper on much singing, though we have found a creative way to continue making music together by singing softly in worship while wearing our masks. Even the Elkhart Municipal Band has been thwarted from performing any concerts, which has put a damper on practicing my euphonium (but please don't tell the director). The yearning for music never goes away, for creatively pouring out our hearts through song or instruments can be a spiritual practice for many of us, helping us express our deepest emotions and our faith.

That may be why Hanna broke out in prayerful song when she learned she was expecting a baby, which she thought might never be possible for her to do. Her story in 1 Samuel begins in conflict, with the narrator telling us she could not have children.

She finally reached a point where she would cry in sorrow all day and could not eat even though her husband tried to comfort her and reassure Hannah that he loved her.

When she went to the temple to pray one day, she promised God that if she had a son, she would dedicate him to serving God. Her prayers must have sounded so mournful, for Eli, the priest, mistook her pleas as signs of drunkenness. When Eli realized his mistaken assumption and that she deeply desired a child, he blessed her and reassured her that God heard her prayers.

In time Hannah became pregnant and had a son, whom she named Samuel, and in response, Hannah sang a song of deliverance:

I'm bursting with GOD-news!  
I'm walking on air.  
I'm laughing at my rivals.  
I'm dancing my salvation.

Nothing and no one is holy like GOD,  
no rock mountain like our God.<sup>1</sup>

It makes sense, doesn't it, for Hannah to joyfully sing in response to discovering she was expecting a

2

child? I imagine you've heard someone excitedly tell about the upcoming birth of a baby. I recall how I wanted to tell everyone when I learned about the upcoming birth of my children, for life seemed to shift in amazing ways. I eagerly learned as much as I could about the gradual grow of my child in the womb. I found the prenatal classes engaging, as did one couple who

before the arrival of their son attended birthing classes at the hospital. One day they toured the maternity ward. The instructor told all about what would take place while they were in the hospital. In passing, the instructor said that on the last evening of their stay they would be treated to a complimentary dinner for two and mentioned the menu selections. As they continued the tour, the woman was thinking about all the exiting things that would take place when the baby arrived. She turned and whispered to her husband, "Honey, I'm getting so excited."

"Me, too," he replied. "I'm going to order the lobster."<sup>2</sup>

Each person may approach a birth with different feelings and thoughts—from the special dinner in the hospital to preparing the baby's room, from

wondering how to pay the new expenses for a child to finding the best baby bed.

Hannah may have shared some of these same thoughts, but in her song, she expressed a deeper hope for her child. Did you notice how her song expressed her hopes for humanity?

The LORD makes poor and makes rich;  
he brings low, he also exalts.  
He raises up the poor from the dust;  
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes  
and inherit a seat of honor.<sup>3</sup>

She was not only thinking of the joy a child would bring her, but she was thinking beyond her emotions to see the bigger picture: a world with fairness and justice, a world where everyone had what they needed rather than the few hoarding most of the resources. A place where everyone is welcome—the poor eating at places of honor with those in power.

Interestingly, about a thousand years later, another woman uttered remarkably similar words in

3

response to hearing the news that she would give birth:

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;  
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.<sup>4</sup>

Where have you heard these words before? We often hear them during Advent as Mary learns of the coming birth of her child, Jesus. Along with Hannah, she offers a prayer in the form of a song of deliverance, hoping her child will make a difference in the world.

With each new child, the world has the potential of becoming a better place, a safer place, a place of peace. Through the recent actions of some children, that is already happening.

- “Melati and Isabel Wijsen were only 10 and 12...when they started on a course of activism that has drastically decreased the global usage of single-use plastic.”<sup>5</sup> Through beach cleanups and government petitions, they were able to get plastic bags banned from their home island of Bali, which has led to reductions in 15 countries.
- After Sierra Leone's civil war, Kelvin Doe was eleven years old when began searching for ways to improve his country. “By 13, he was powering neighborhood houses with batteries made out of acid, soda and metal in a tin cup. He went on to build a community radio station out of recycled parts that he powered with a generator also made out of reused material.”
- “After 9-year-old Jahkil helped his aunt distribute food at a local homeless shelter in his native Chicago, Jahkil decided he wanted to do more to help his community... Jahkil distributes ‘Blessing Bags’ full of snacks, toiletries, a towel, and socks to people experiencing homelessness. Over



④

3,000 Blessing Bags have been given out in Chicago communities.”

- When Ryan Hickman was 3, he visited a recycling center. “At 7, Ryan started Ryan’s Recycling. What started out as collecting cans and bottles from his neighbors as recycling has risen to over 50 customers and over 200,000 bottles and cans.”

Each of these children has made a difference in the world, like Hannah envisioned for her son

Samuel. I suggest that’s a reason to join with her in singing songs of deliverance, celebrating that God’s Spirit continues to bring hope and healing into our world.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 2:1-2, *The Message Bible*

<sup>2</sup> Hodgin, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #76.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 2:7-8, NRSV.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:47-48, 51-53, NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> Following stories from [www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/inspirational-stories/g5188/kids-who-changed-the-world](http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/inspirational-stories/g5188/kids-who-changed-the-world)