



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London

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Diocese of Chelmsford

## **Title**

Mothering Sunday

## **Readings**

1 Samuel 2:20-28  
Exodus 2:1-10

## **Date**

22 March, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

Today is the 22<sup>nd</sup> March, the fourth Sunday of Lent. It has quite a few other names too. It is also known as Laetare Sunday, the refreshment Sunday of Lent, the Sunday of the five loaves, Rose Sunday, Pudding Pie Sunday, Braggot Sunday, Simnel Sunday, Mothering Sunday and for many ..... Mother's Day.

It's a mid way point between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday and so some celebrate the day as a relaxation of the Lent fast.

There are a number of readings for today, including the birth of Moses in Exodus chapter 2 and the dedication of Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 2. In both readings there is a mother and the gift of a child is both received and given.

In the reading from 1 Samuel we meet a woman, a child and the High Priest, Hannah, Samuel and Eli.

Hannah comes to pray, to plead with God. She's desperate. Eli looks on and pronounces judgment, "You're drunk, you're a mess, sort yourself out."

Hannah pleads with Eli, the high priest, "Don't think I am a worthless woman!"

"I am desperate, I have been praying."

God didn't see a worthless woman. God gives her a child and Hannah says, "as soon as the child is weaned I will take him to the house of the Lord, where he will stay all his life."

So delighted is Hannah with her gift from God that she keeps him safe, hides him away, nurtures him, prepares him, and then lets him go to serve in the temple.

This Sunday we will see an increase in attendance at Sunday worship. More will come. Some will come to be thankful for mothers and motherly love, some will come out of the deep desire to worship God, some to pray, some to sing, some to come away and be quiet. Some will be joyful, some sorrowful. Some will be suffering. Some will be lonely, some will be desperate. Some will need to be surrounded by others and some will look for a quiet corner to pray. Some will find this Sunday hard and although it might be their custom to attend, they may stay away.

Some will be Hannah, some will be Samuel, some will be Eli.

Some years ago, in my own home church we saw a steady and large rise in young families attending monthly all age worship services. The rise in attendance was matched by a rise in consternation. Things were noisier, messier, less predictable. Where on earth do we put all the pushchairs? And these new people were not familiar with how things were done.

We tried to think creatively about readings, sermons and intercessions. How could we engage all in meaningful times of prayer. One idea we had for prayer was to give each person, young and old, a small piece of cloth. We asked them to hold the cloth and told the story of the woman who was ill, had nowhere to go, and was so desperate that she followed Jesus. She reached out and touched his cloak. And she was made better.

We then asked everyone to hold the piece of cloth, to rub it between their fingers and to imagine they were in the crowd and they were touching Jesus.

We asked,

What would you like Jesus to do for you?

What would you like Jesus to do for those you love?

What would you like Jesus to do in our world?

People prayed. And took their little piece of cloth home and prayed at home.

Hannah asked for a child. What might your request be?

What would you like Jesus to do for you?

What would you like Jesus to do for those you love?

What would you like Jesus to do in our world?

Samuel spent his days and nights serving in the temple, trimming the wicks so the lights might always shine. Eli grew old and increasingly blind and deaf, physically, morally and spiritually. He stopped seeing and stopped hearing. And when God spoke, it was to the child.

My prayer is that I might come to God as Hannah did, knowing that only God can answer. And I pray that as I receive, so I might also give. Bless me that I might be a blessing.

My prayer is that I might be like Samuel, keen, eager, hopeful, listening, willing.

My prayer is that I might not be like Eli, judgmental, deaf and blind to the needs of others and the words of God.

As people come to worship on this fourth Sunday of Lent they will come for different reasons with different needs, different expectations and with different understandings. May each find that God meets them in their need and in their joy, in their sorrow and in their struggle, and in their celebrations.

And today, the fourth Sunday of Lent we thank God for love in all its wonderful manifestations, especially motherly love, as shown through Hannah.