1 Samuel 2:26 And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men.

Do you remember this history from Sunday school? It is such a captivating story and I think a rather inspirational history. It goes like this. There is a man named Elkanah who has two wives. Peninnah and Hannah. Back in those days the Lord allowed more than one wife but in the days of Jesus God made it clear that we are to have only one wife. What is also clear in God’s Word is the troubles that arise in such arrangements. Peninnah had children and Hannah had none. This caused considerable difficulty for 1 Sam. 1:6 says, **“And because the Lord had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.”** Worse yet, the Scripture goes on to say that this went on year after year. Such information doesn’t paint a good picture of Elkanah or of Pininnah.

Now Hannah, though embittered by her rival, doesn’t seek revenge or even appear to want to lash out. Hannah instead simply takes her troubles to the Lord. We are told she would do this every chance she got, especially when she was at the Tabernacle, which in this day was located at Shiloh. On one occasion while at Shiloh scripture records this: **“In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow, saying, ‘O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.’”**

Do you recall what happened at this point? Eli the High Priest saw Hannah praying and because she was not praying out loud but rather in her heart, Eli assumed the worst. He assumed she was drunk and chastised her. But Hannah spoke to him of her anguish and Eli then blessed her and added his prayer that God would grant what she was asking. It is evidently not long after this that Hannah conceives and gives birth to a son. The boy was named Samuel, a name that means “heard of God.” And so it was that God blessed Hannah with a son and we learn how God can change lives.

What is neat about all of this is that Hannah had promised the Lord that if he gave her a son, then she would give that son back to the service of the Lord. As you recall the words of our Old Testament reading, note that such is what the words of our text are pointing to, to the fact that Hannah kept her promise. After Samuel had been weaned, he was given into the service of the Lord. Samuel went and lived at the Temple. Little Samuel served Eli the High Priest. It is clear that this Mom cared deeply for her child, she made him a special robe every year, and yet this child lived at the Temple and served the Lord.

Well, that’s all fine and well, Pastor, but what is the point of talking about Samuel on this day of the church year. This is the First Sunday of Christmas. This is a day that we should be celebrating and focusing on the awesome gift that God has given us in Jesus. So why is it that this reading of Samuel is chosen? What does Samuel have to do with Jesus? How can we learn of Jesus with a text like this?

Those are great questions. I will begin answering those questions by asking you if you remember what a “shadow” is in the Scriptures? A shadow is a person or event of the Old Testament that serves as a glimpse of what we can expect or what we will find in the life and events of the Christ, the Son of God. So it is with this text. Our theme will be: **GOD PROVIDES A PROPHET.**

The first place I see a shadow in the life of Samuel is actually found in his mom. It is very clear that Hannah was a God fearing and very pious believer in the Lord and his love. Hannah had made a promise and kept it. Hannah gave her son to the Lord. Seriously, what an absolute marvel this is. It is a beautiful example of faith in God, really putting your trust and confidence in the Lord God. It is exactly what a believing woman is.

Please note that I think Hannah is a shadow of Mary, what we will see in Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is also a God-fearing and devout believer in the Lord. Mary also puts her complete trust and confidence in God. What did Mary say to the angel? **“May it be to me as you have said.”** I have no doubt that Mary, her whole life, had to keep that trust and confidence in the Lord especially as she watched her Son grow and then die on the cross. So yes, the first shadow of this history is the picture of a God believing pious Mom whose goal is the will and purpose of the Lord. Thank God for such mothers as these!

Then let’s turn our attention to Samuel. If there is one thing that is true, we could grasp absolutely that the Lord sent Samuel to effect a change in the things that were going on. You see, God had a problem because of unfaithfulness among his people. Although we believe Eli to have been a faithful High Priest it is equally clear that Eli’s sons were not faithful to the Lord. To be more blunt, Eli’s sons were wicked men who despised the Lord’s sacrifices and were even committing adultery with the women who served at the Temple. Sadly, Eli did nothing about this. Into this situation God brought little Samuel. Samuel did what was right. Samuel served the Lord. That’s the point of the verse we highlighted, **“And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men.”** This verse tells us that Samuel, despite all the bad around him, did what was right and good in the eyes of the Lord.

Think of the circumstances that Samuel grew up in. For this young lad to stay faithful, to keep his focus on serving the Lord and doing what was right must have been a real challenge. Yet, that is just what he did. And when the Lord finally reveals himself to Samuel, one of the first tasks he had was to tell Eli the judgment God had for him and his family for their wickedness. Samuel, spoke the truth to Eli and from that point on Samuel is recognized as a prophet and spokesman for the Lord. So those words of our text also affirm the piety and strong faith of Samuel, a faith that strives for good and right.

The shadow of Samuel is seen in the life of Jesus. What a struggle his life must have been. I don’t think we give that much thought. Here is the perfect Son of God who is living and growing in the sinful world among sinful people. When we are told that in Jesus, **“we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin,”** we need to take that seriously. The perfect God living in the completely sinful world. The depth of his struggle must have been astounding. Yet Jesus did it. Again don’t overlook what Luke states: **“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”** That is Luke affirming the same thing that was done with Samuel. Jesus, despite all the bad around him, did what was right and good in the eyes of the Lord!

Another shadow found in Samuel. Do you recall how the Lord made Samuel a prophet? How the Lord kept calling Samuel and how he kept going to Eli to see what Eli wanted? It was eventually Eli who recognized it was the Lord calling. Scripture makes it clear that God appearing and God speaking with his people was something very rare in those days. So here is Samuel directing and guiding God’s people in the way and truth of the Lord.

Jesus fulfills this shadow perfectly. We can also grasp that “the Word of the Lord was rare” in the days of Jesus, after all, it had been 400 years since the last prophet of God. Now here comes Jesus, speaking truth and love, speaking of the false faith of the people and leading God’s people back to trust and confidence in what the Word of God actually said. Of course, Jesus is the very heart and core of the Word of God. Jesus didn’t need the Lord to speak to him, rather He was the Lord and everything he did and everything He said was the truth and revelation of the Father. How does Scripture testify to this? John chapter 1 states of Jesus, **”The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** Or another way is when Jesus said, **”I and the Father are one.”** Yes, Jesus is the very fulfillment of the Prophet, the perfect prophet of God.

Now, do you remember what I said earlier? I said, “It all happened so that God could effect a change among his people.” The greatest point of Samuel is how Samuel lead people back to God and his truth. Throughout much of his life, Samuel kept the people on track, kept the wonder of God before them and kept them focused on the grace, love and compassion of God as revealed in the ceremonial laws the people had before them. Samuel was a tremendous servant of the Lord and the last of the prophet / judges the Lord sent to his people. Sad to say, as Samuel aged the people simply ignored him. This was due mostly to the fact that God had allowed Israel to have a king. Saul had been made king and Saul had become an unbeliever leading the people away from the Lord, and for that would lose his royal status. We do note that Israel mourns Samuel’s loss but the simple way it is recorded in Scripture leads one to believe that no one was really concerned with his loss. Yet, Samuel had effected, with the help of the Lord, great changes for their good and salvation.

The very same thing can be said of Jesus, that Jesus came to effect great changes for the people and fulfill the shadow found in Samuel. Jesus clearly served as a prophet, THE PROPHET of the Lord. Jesus made clear the plan and purpose of God. Jesus made clear the salvation that God had intended and was now carrying out in His life. Jesus clearly served the Lord in such a way that people benefitted, yes, received from Jesus the blessings, the eternal blessings of God.

The chief and greatest blessing of Jesus is the message of our salvation and peace with God. That message was not only taught, that message was lived for us. That’s important to grasp. If all Jesus had done was tell us how God loved us, tell us about faith, tell us what we should do, there is no joy and hope here. Jesus doesn’t just tell us, he shows us. He shows us by living perfectly for us and when the time was right He shows us the full extent of God’s love as He dies on the cross for sin. He shows us love as he declares from the cross, **“Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.”** Those words were not just for the people then, but for us too. We are just as responsible for Jesus being on the cross. And when Jesus cried out, **“It is finished,”** what a pure marvel. Jesus telling us that sin was paid for, that complete and sure atonement was accomplished by his suffering of hell. And Jesus dying on the cross is not even the end of the story.

It doesn’t end because Jesus rises from the dead and in that actual and physical resurrection of Jesus we know that our redemption is won. There is no doubt. Jesus is God’s Son. Jesus is our redeemer. Jesus has promised that because he lives, we too will live. Yes, the work of redemption is finished. This work of redemption is now given to us. We are forgiven in Jesus. We are given eternal life in Jesus. We are made the children of God and heirs of eternal life just because of Jesus. And now I believe that we have the opportunity and ability in Jesus to grow in wisdom and faith, in favor with God and man. All of this in Jesus.

One more small shadow to notice. You do remember I said that Samuel had appointed a king to rule over the people. Please note that Jesus also appointed a king over the people. In this case, it is Jesus himself who takes on the role. Only He is the perfect king who watches over us, protects us, guards and keeps us all for the sake and good of our eternal salvation. Jesus is seeing to it that everything necessary to get us into heaven is being done in our lives and hearts. Jesus is the perfect king for us

Now I hope you can see how this history of Samuel serves to point us to Jesus. Samuel, the shadow, helping us to see and grasp the wonder of Jesus. Amen.