

are devoid of the knowledge of God. That lack produces an emptiness that nothing of this world can fill. It is our duty as Christians to reach out to such people, and to show them how full of meaning life can become when they reach toward God through His Church.

What practical steps, what resolutions, can we make so as to become true evangelizers for the Armenian Church?

- Bring (not just invite) three new people to church this year.
- Encourage the formation of Bible studies, and study groups on the faith and worship of the Armenian Church, in your parish or community.
- Be willing to take part in religious discussions with your neighbors, friends, and workmates. Don't let religion be a topic you never talk about.
- Pray for God's guidance in finding ways you can use your particular talents and gifts to evangelize for His Church.



WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED THE LORD

A series on women in the bible and in the history of the Church

Hannah, The Mother Of Samuel

How many mothers want their sons to be priests? In our own day it's common for parents to cite many reasons for their boys to stay *away* from the priesthood: financial insecurity, little in the way of worldly "prestige", the awesome responsibility of caring for people's eternal souls, huge demands on one's time and energy.

Yet in the Old Testament we meet a woman who lived when the Jewish religious community was in decay, a time when priests had to deal with an indifferent, morally corrupt people. This woman gave her son, and gave him willingly. Her name was Hannah.

We meet Hannah in the opening chapters of I Samuel (for she is to be the mother of that great prophet-priest and last of the Judges) and we immediately learn that for much of her adult life she has carried the heartache

and cultural shame of being childless. She is married to the priest Elkanah, and his other wife, who has borne him children, teases her mercilessly with her barrenness. Sad indeed, and yet Hannah bears no malice. In fact she is apparently one of those women who has a way with men, for in spite of her childlessness she is her husband's favorite. He says to her, with a typically male mix of tenderness and hurt pride, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

Hannah is always able to impress men—specifically Eli the priest—with her devout prayer. He sees her near the temple in Shiloh, where her husband has come to make a sacrifice to God, and she is weeping bitterly and deeply distressed. At first he reproaches her for drunkenness, but she explains what she is really doing. She has made a vow that if God will give her a son, she will "give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head." She asks Eli not to consider her a base woman, for "I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord." So struck is this venerable priest by the conviction behind her words that he himself prays that God may fulfill her petition.

In "due time" as the Scripture puts it, Hannah does conceive and bears a son. True to her promise, she takes him to the temple to dedicate him to God's service. She gives him to Eli and says, "I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me my petition which I made to him. Therefore I have lent him [my son] to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord." Then she prays a long and beautiful prayer of thanksgiving to God—Hannah is not one to pray only when she wants or needs something.

It is no small matter for Hannah to give her son to the Jewish temple at this particular time. Things are not good; the text of I Samuel tells us that Eli's sons were "worthless men" and that they "treated the offering of the Lord with contempt." Eli even reproaches them for sleeping with the women who serve at the entrance to the tent of meeting. What an awful moral atmosphere into which to send one's only, long-awaited son! And Hannah has truly given him over, for we are told that she "used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." And then they would return home.

What kind of faith would it take to leave your little son in such an environment? Surely it would take a certainty that God is still God, that to know Him and worship Him is more important than any outward faults in the people who inhabit His temple or His church. Hannah believed in God, and was not about to let the immorality of Eli's sons keep her son from being in God's presence. We can be sure that she would not be one to say that it's all right to stay away from church because all the churchgoers are hypocrites

