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## *Where is God Being Born?*

**A sermon by Canon Lauren Holder**  
**Proper 28 – Year B**

When I first read the lectionary for this week, a favorite quote from an early church mystic immediately came to mind. But before I can share that quote, I have to name a difficult truth about our texts today. The truth is that the story of Hannah praying with abandon for a son in 1 Samuel, the Song of Hannah wonderfully similar to the Song of Mary we will recall often during Advent, and even Jesus' words in Mark's gospel comparing war and famine to the "birth pangs" of a new kingdom—all of these texts can be especially painful to anyone who has ever struggled with infertility, or unanswered prayers for children, or any kind of "barrenness." Please hear me when I say, barrenness is not a symptom of weak faith. And despite what many of our most familiar Bible stories may say about hopefulness, faith, and answered prayers—there is also an entire book of the Bible dedicated to lamentations. Because lament is just as true as miracles—and our Holy Scriptures remind us that God leaves space for all of it. Indeed there is space in this community for all of it—in this beautiful sanctuary for all of it—and at this altar for all of it.

So, whether you hear today's readings with hopefulness and joy, or with anguish and desperation—you are right to feel the way you do.

With that truth named, and with some trepidation having named it, I will share with you the quote I mentioned before. It is from a man—who had no womb—named Meister Eckhart. And he said, "All of us are mothers of God, because God is always waiting to be born."

What this speaks to, to me, is God's ongoing desire to be incarnate—first in the person of Jesus Christ, love incarnate, the Word made flesh, Emmanuel, God with us. But then incarnate in the Church, and in each of us, and in every person created in the image and likeness of God.

When I read today's gospel from Mark, and I hear the apocalyptic language of war, earthquakes and famine, two things come to mind. One is that war and earthquakes and famine sound a little too familiar. Add to that fire, mass exodus, and asylum seeking—you just might think Jesus is talking about us. And in that context, I start looking for all the places God is waiting to be born—all the places God is asking us to make God incarnate in this world.

I was driving in the car last week and listened to an interview of people who have found themselves in a pop-up community formed in a Walmart parking lot as they flee forest fires. Hundreds of strangers caring for one another like family. God is being born there. Love is again incarnate. God remains with us.

Some of our parishioners are worshipping with Church of the Common Ground this afternoon—a church without walls serving alongside the homeless community of Atlanta. There will be acapella singing, honest and vulnerable prayers, grape juice and bread, shivering hands clapping. God is being born there. Love is again incarnate. God remains with us.

A couple of weeks ago, we hosted Becca Stevens for a spirituality conference. An Episcopal priest and social justice entrepreneur, one of Becca's most recent ventures has been to me especially compelling. She took a bunch of looms to a Syrian refugee camp and hired eight women to weave welcome mats out of discarded blankets and life vests. Think about that. Refugees welcome almost nowhere making welcome mats out of the very life vests and blankets they used to escape

death. God is being born there. Love is again incarnate. God remains with us.

The other thing Mark's gospel and Jesus' apocalyptic language reminds me is that "the end of the world" is a message of hope to the oppressed. We may hear the term "apocalypse" and get uncomfortable thinking about the "end times" and what will be. But to Jesus and his fellow Jews, nothing could be more hopeful than the end of the Roman empire and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

And the Kingdom of God, at least as Jesus describes it throughout the Gospels, seems to me to be the ultimate incarnation. When the presence of God and the rule of God is so full and so whole and so real and so pervasive, that this world and all of us are almost unrecognizable—because we are a new creation in Christ.

Two things I find helpful in thinking about these incarnational moments with relation to Hannah are: First, that she started experiencing healing and wholeness when she felt heard. It was not in the birth of her son, but even before that, in the assurance that she had been heard. Perhaps you've heard people say, "I hear you" or "I see you" in response to folks facing adversity. It is good to listen to and to watch for people, to let people know they are seen and heard, because there is healing and wholeness to be found. Second, that when Hannah was granted the deepest desire of her heart, she offered it up to God. What could have been a means of bringing power and attention to herself was instead offered to the glory of God. When we offer that which is given to us to God, when God is glorified, God is that much more incarnate in our world. That much more present. That much more visible and understood and known.

At the end of the day, here is what I am wrestling with this week and I invite you to wrestle with me: Life is hard and lament is real. Struggle and lament are true in the midst of faith, not in the absence of it. And it is in these places that God shows up in us. God is being born. Love is again incarnate. God remains with us. Amen.