

Theme: **The Child who is the Virgin's Great Son of Peace**

Text: Luke 1: 26 – 38

Occasion: 2nd Sunday of Advent

Date: December 9, 2018

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you let the Christ Child bring you peace, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When you think of a hero, do you think of someone who is bigger than you, who is stronger than you, and who can do things that you can't do. Some of the heroes that we might think about are imaginary—like Superman or Captain America. But some of the heroes we think of are real—like firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other people we look up to.

We learn about real heroes in the Bible as well. One of them is Samson. Even before he was born, an angel said that Samson would be heroic, as we heard in our Old Testament reading for today: **The angel tells Manoah's Wife, "He shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines"** (Jg. 13:5)

It was an impossible situation. For forty years, Israel had been suffering under the cruel boot of the Philistines, with the Philistines looting their cities and ravaging their countryside. Severely oppressed and enslaved, Israel was in a dark and hopeless time. So often, the dark and hopeless times give birth to a new or renewed faith in God. God heard the Israelites' repentant groans and did for them what was humanly impossible: He rescued them from the Philistines.

But God's rescue plan did not commence with gathering an underground rebel army or smuggling weapons. His plan centered on one man. Samson was the one man who would single-handedly rescue Israel from their enemies without touching a conventional weapon of war. What is more, God's rescue plan also commenced with circumstances no one was expecting: an angel speaking to a barren woman, the wife of Manoah. **"Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son," the angel proclaimed to her.** The Lord had done great things through the barren wombs of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, and He would yet again do great things through the barren wombs of Hannah and Elizabeth. Yet the wife of Manoah would join their ranks by bearing an important son. His name was Samson.

God's Spirit gave Samson incredible strength. He single-handedly accomplished jaw-dropping feats that became the stuff of legends. Once, while in a vineyard, he was attacked by a vicious lion. Samson tore the lion to pieces with his bare hands, as though the creature

were cotton candy. In another setting, Samson killed one thousand Philistines with a makeshift weapon—the jawbone of a donkey. When the Philistines thought, they had trapped Samson in Gaza, he went out at midnight, tore the city gates from the walls, and carried the gates on his back to the top of a hill. His final feat though was his greatest. Blinded, weakened, and mocked by his enemies, Samson was placed between two pillars in a large building where thousands of Philistines were worshipping their god Dagon. Samson pushed his arms outward against the pillars. Even though it would cause his own death, Samson prayed that God would let him have strength once more to be able to bring the building down on all those Philistines and he did. Three thousand of Israel’s enemies died through Samson’s final act. God’s Spirit did great things through Samson.

However, Samson’s life was supposed to be distinguished not only by his single-handed feats of strength but also by his single-minded devotion to the Lord. Even before he was conceived, he was set apart to live as a Nazirite, forbidden from eating anything unclean, drinking wine or any strong drink, or cutting his hair. He was to be different, to be holy, meaning, “set apart for God’s purposes.” He was to live a life dedicated to the Lord. But while Samson may have wowed us with his strength, he didn’t wow anyone with his dedication to the Lord; again, and again, he failed to live up to his Nazirite calling.

In our Baptism, we, too, were called to be holy; to think and live differently than the world around us that opposes God. God’s Word says to us, “**You shall be holy, for I am holy**” (1 Peter 1:16). But to our shame, we are like Samson—we have not wowed anyone with our holiness. We’ve been undisciplined and self-indulgent. We’ve compromised and have too often blended in with the world, instead of standing out as a light in the darkness of this world. We’ve been much more devoted to our sports teams than to the Lord and His Church at time. We’ve been much more dedicated to our impulses and desires than to the Lord. We’ve been much more committed to our own ways than to the Lord’s. Our dedication to living a holy life has not wowed God, and we stand guilty before Him. We find ourselves in an impossible situation from which we cannot rescue ourselves from.

But the *Lord* can. And He *has*! Rejoice that the Lord is more dedicated to you and me than we are to Him. He has done for you and me than what we could ever do our selves. In the fullness of time, at a time of great oppression, the same God who acted for Israel through Samson acted for the world. He acted for you and me. With single-minded devotion, He

rescued you and me from our sins and from the devil we chose to obey. He has single-handedly done what is humanly impossible. He has rescued you and me by the greatest rescue plan ever. Rejoice. **“For nothing will be impossible with God.”**

Six times in Scripture God did wondrous things through the wombs of unlikely women. But in our Gospel reading for today, He does an even more wonderful thing through the womb of the most unlikely seventh women. He speaks His word through the angel Gabriel, and a faithful virgin named Mary conceives the greatest Deliverer of all. God outdoes Himself; the rescue plan for the world begins not through a barren womb, but through a *new* one. **“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,” the angel said.** Mary’s womb would bear not a sinful, imperfect childlike Samson, but rather the sinless, perfect Child—the Son of God - Jesus. No wonder Gabriel said, **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High . . . Of His kingdom, there will be no end . . . The child to be born will be called holy.”** *What Child Is This?* This Child is God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

The Child conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary was the Greater Samson. His life was also set apart, but He did not waver from His calling and the purpose of His life. Also unlike Samson, Jesus’ greatness was not found in His single-handed feats of strength. Instead, His greatness was in setting aside His divine strength to single-handedly do everything necessary for our salvation. He had the strength to easily rip apart the lion, Satan. Yet for our sake, He placed Himself inside Satan’s jaws, suffering God’s righteous judgment in our place. He could have used the jawbone of a donkey to wipe out a world of people who have sinned against Him. But instead, He went willingly to the Place of a Skull, Golgotha, to suffer death in our place. He could have destroyed all those who have rebelled against Him; but instead, He lifted all rebellion onto His back and took it up a hill to atone for it. He could have stretched out His arms and crushed His enemies at any time. But instead, for our sake, He let Himself be blindfolded, beaten, and mocked so that He might stretch out His arms, His dying arms on a cross and let hell’s punishment do its worst against Him and not against you and me.

Yet the greatest act this Child ever did was rise from the dead on the third day. He single-handedly won the ultimate victory for you and me while bringing eternal judgment on His foes by rising from the dead and ascending to the right hand of God, our Father.

From a new womb to a new tomb, this Child’s whole life was dedicated to making *you*

and me new—a new creation in God’s love, filled with the same Holy Spirit that empowered Samson, the same Holy Spirit that overshadowed Mary. You and I can now say with Mary, **“Let it be to me, Lord, according to Your Word.”** When the Lord sends trials, we can say, “Let it be, Lord; for what You ordain is always good.” If the cancer comes back, we can still say, “Let it be, Lord; for Your will is always the best.” In impossible situations, in times of deep discouragement and depression, we can still say, “Let it be, Lord; You know best when to end it all.” For our Lord is great, His mercy is great and His victory is greater. In His greatness, He has given us a new hope and the true peace that the world is looking for. So, in the name of Jesus, our Great Deliverer, we go out and shine in this world like a light showing the way to the Salvation given to us by this child born of the Virgin Mary. Amen.