

## God Provides

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Savior and our Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

What a great story to have before us on All Saints Sunday. (SLIDE) Elijah, one of the greatest Prophets of the Old Testament, is also one of the first names to come to mind when I think of who and what the Saints and All Saints Sunday are really all about. Before we take a deep dive into today's scripture, we all might benefit from a short background and some context for today's reading. Under King David all 12 tribes of Israel came together to form one consolidated Kingdom. (SLIDE) After King Solomon sinned by marrying many foreign wives and setting up temples for their worship God's Holy protection was withdrawn and the Kingdom became divided into the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah. Ahab was King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. One chapter earlier in the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings we're told God has declared King Ahab to be evil in God's sight because he married Jezebel and then introduced the worship of the false god Baal. (SLIDE) The Bible tells us "Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him" (1 Kgs. 16:33) and leading God's people into the worship of this false god called Baal was chief among the things that raised God's wrath to new heights. Among Baal's many characteristics was the ability to bring rain. Baal was a god of rain. (SLIDE) So, when Elijah announced God's plan to bring a severe draught

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upon the land, it was a direct confrontation with King Ahab, Queen Jezebel, and a challenge to their god Baal.

As our story for today begins, Elijah has only recently informed Ahab his actions have brought a drought upon Israel. Mount Carmel is known as the place where Elijah hid from Jezebel and her warriors. (SLIDE) This map shows where Mount Carmel is located in relation to the town of Zarephath. Elijah told King Ahab this drought would not be lifted except upon God's command. After he delivered this message, God instructed Elijah to hide in the Wadi Cherith. The picture on the right side is from our trip to the Holy Lands back in 2006. The wadi Elijah was told to hide near is this tiny creek in the picture. It seems to be a pleasant enough place. There was water to drink, and "ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening." The problem was that because of Ahab's wickedness, God brought a huge drought on Israel and it fell on the just and the unjust. It falls on the Wadi Cherith too. It falls on Elijah, who was hiding there. Elijah needs another option... He needs a plan B.

My experience with God's Plans has been bittersweet. Sometimes you have to go through the bitter to get to the sweet. I'm certain it wasn't all sugar plums and unicorns trying to survive a Godly draught, even if you're hiding out in a well-watered wadi. I mean relying on wild birds, Ravens no less, to provide for your

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daily bread and meat... Today, the only thing I want to have to do with Ravens is to watch my Browns beat them... (SLIDE) Nevertheless, I'm certain Elijah was happy to receive the bread and meat twice a day...

This draught was so severe even the wadi where Elijah was hiding out dried up. Enter God's Plan b... God sends Elijah, a wilderness living, wild man, into the town of Zarephath. Now, at this point in the story, my mind goes back to my seminary days and one particular professor who always asked us to come up with Headlines, like from a newspaper story for each of our Bible stories. (SLIDE) So, my headline or hook for this story is "Widows, Orphans, and Strangers!" God provided a certain widow from the town of Zarephath, to meet and care for this wild-man prophet. In ancient times when the father dies, leaving a wife and children, the children were considered orphans because they didn't have an adult male to provide for their needs. Single mothers typically were not able to provide for their children. The meeting of the wild man prophet with the Widow and her orphan son, was far more than a chance meeting. Elijah stayed with this widow and son for at least a couple of years, maybe longer. When they first met, Elijah, the wild man prophet of God tested out this widow's situation and her willingness to serve God by asking for a sip of water and a morsel of bread. Imagine Elijah's initial reaction when she tells him she's gathering sticks to make a fire so she can cook up the last of her meal and oil to make a small cake so she and her son might

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eat it and then die of starvation. I imagine Elijah going back to God in prayer asking if there might be a Plan C... God, surely this can't be your plan... You sent me to this poor widow who is unable to even provide for the 2 of them. How will she ever provide for the three of us? God's answer to Elijah's prayer was to refresh the oil and the meal jugs each and every day. Others were starving because of Ahab's sin, but God still provided for his prophet and for the Widow and her orphaned son. I believe there is ample Biblical evidence that God favors not just widows and orphans, but all people who are oppressed or impoverished.

The miracles in this story just keep coming. After a time, the son dies. (SLIDE) The Widow is distraught as you can imagine. Imagine the pain of a woman who has now lost both her husband and her only son. It certainly must have been unbearable. The grief must have permeated every nook and cranny of the house until Elijah couldn't take it one more minute. He took the corpse upstairs and covered the boy's body with his own three times, while each time beseeching God to intervein. Intervein, God did! The boy was brought back to life and given back to his mother. Sorrow turned to joy in an instant!

Elijah was most certainly one of God's Saints. At the end of his life, God brought him directly to heaven in a chariot of fire no less. (SLIDE) I wish I had the faith and the trust in God of Elijah. Food provided by Ravens and then

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unending meal and oil for bread. God provided each and every thing Elijah needed, every step along the way. We worship a God who provides for us, not a God who requires sacrifice to earn Gods love and friendship.

God used Elijah to bring a son back to his mother even as God used the Widow to sustain Elijah's own life. You see, God had big things in store for Elijah. I wish I had the courage to stand up to evil powerful men like Elijah did to King Ahad. Because of Elijah's faith, God was able to use him for some pretty impressive miracles. Raising the dead was only the beginning. (SLIDE) The rest of the story of Elijah includes slaying all of the prophets of Baal. Remember the story about the fire from heaven that consumed the bull on the altar even after it had been doused with and soaked in water. All while the prophets of Baal were humiliated and embarrassed because their god couldn't even muster up a single spark on their altar.

Elijah was one of the Saints, but there were countless others. Today, you are all numbered among the Saints as well. Maybe you'll never be fed from the beak of a raven or raise a dead person back to life. Maybe you'll never be called on to stand up to evil in our day. Maybe you won't even have to experience famine, draught or poverty. One thing I know for sure, we will all experience the pain and the sting of death. God isn't in the business of changing the physical laws of

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nature in most cases. Yes, miracles still happen, but they are rare and I don't believe we can count on God sparing the lives of every single person we pray for. While that may be true, the good news for us today is that God is most certainly in the business of granting forgiveness of our sins and offering us eternal life beginning now. Because of God's lovingkindness and his grace, we are the Saints God has called and promised to care for and to love forever. The death of the widow's son in our story was tragic, but his death wasn't the end of the story. Elijah raising him back to life wasn't the end either. The end of the story hadn't been written yet. When God raised Jesus from the dead, a whole new promise, and whole new covenant was made between God and mankind. (SLIDE) Death is no longer the end. It's merely a gateway into eternal life with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now that's a great way to write an ending...

May the faith of Elijah the prophet of God inspire all the Saints today to trust in God for our daily needs. May all the Saints who helped to form our faith rest in the eternal care of their God and our God. At the last, may we all be brought into that great communion of Saints to take our place at the table for the festival given in honor of God's one and only begotten Son, our Savior and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.