

## WAITING FOR GOD NOT GODOT

In a play, 'Waiting for Godot', Samuel Beckett describes two men on a lonely road by a leafless tree. Nothing happens, nothing is certain.

In our OT reading today the writer, Samuel, describes his mother, Hannah, waiting for God to answer her prayers. Something happens.

Israel was in disarray – both threatened by the Philistines and from inner decay and corruption. The nation was in dire need of deliverance. God's intervention was their only hope. Sound familiar for our nation?

God works in unexpected ways. He chose this time to intervene through a downcast marginalized individual – anguished, childless Hannah. Hannah's husband is worried, 'Why are you so sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?'

Their culture saw childlessness as a curse.

'Spiritual barrenness is the way of human history without God. It is hopelessness, powerlessness, joylessness. It is to be without a future. The women in the OT felt this deeply – Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Hannah. Yahweh steps into this hopeless, barren void and creates a future for God's people.'

Hannah was one of two wives of Elkanah. The other wife had children and taunted Hannah. There was nothing for Hannah to do but pray in her anguish and grief. 'Oh God, if you'll take a long look at my pain, if you'll act on my behalf by giving me a son, I'll give him unreservedly to you. I'll set him apart for a life of holy living.' 1 Sam.1.10

Have you ever felt utterly alone? Have you ever thought that those around you didn't seem to understand what you were going through? We feel alone when someone we love has died before their time and when the sense of grief is magnified by shattered hopes and dreams: when we are overcome with the 'what-ifs' and the 'could-have-beens'. What had they done wrong? Hannah was consumed by such thoughts but, into the bleakness of her life, God spoke through Eli the priest and brought hope. 'Go in peace; and may the God of Israel give you what you have asked.'

Hannah persevered and she trusted God. Later her son, Samuel was born. When he was weaned she brought the little fella back to Eli and left him there! Amazing that she was empowered to rejoice in a wonderful prayer of gratitude to her good God.

'I'm bursting with joy,

No-one is holy like God. God knows what's going on.

He knows everything that happens to us.

He gives strength to the weak.

The barren woman has children.

He puts poor people on their feet again;

he re-kindles burnt out lives with fresh hope, restoring dignity and respect to them.

He gives the poor a place in the sun! He cares for his people, step by step. God's enemies will be blown away and God will set things right on the earth.'

As we pause on the eve of Advent we are reminded of another woman, Mary, who was ecstatic with praise when she knew that she would be the mother of Messiah Jesus.

'My soul magnifies the Lord...'

'I'm bursting with this news from God.

I'm dancing the song.

God took one look at me, and what happened?

I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!

What God has done for me will never be forgotten.

God is holy, set apart from all others.

His mercy flows in wave after wave on those in awe of him.

He bared his arm and showed his strength

scattering the proud ones.

He knocked tyrants off their high horses and pulled victims out of the mud.

The starving poor sat down to a banquet:

the callous rich were left out in the cold.

He embraced his chosen child, Israel;

he remembered and piled on the mercies.

It's exactly as he promised.' Luke 1. 46-55

Hannah and Mary sing visions of justice, peace and a righteous community which will accompany their babies' lives. We are invited into their world of prophetic imagination. Let us stop lamenting 'the way things are going' and not only look, but see, the way God works. Expect God to come among us each day and live with hope. We are not waiting for nothing and we can be sure that God will answer and come to us.

So let's wait for God with hope this Advent. And as Jesus comes again to us we will remember to 'look up, for our redemption is coming'. Luke 21. 28b 'Dear Lord, help us to wait as Hannah and Mary did and to rejoice in your coming.' AMEN

READINGS : 1 Samuel 1: 4 – 20 Luke 1. 46 – 55

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