

A good mother

Georgina Byrne *reflects on*
1 Samuel 1:20-end

What makes a good mother? Was Hannah a good mother, praying desperately for a child, only then to leave him in the care of an old priest? Was Moses' mother good, putting him in a basket on the river? Or even Mary, who failed to notice that she and Joseph had left Jesus behind in the Temple when he was only twelve? If we want an image of perfect motherhood – the sort that conforms to the high standards of greetings cards – then the Bible is not a good place to look. The Bible does not provide us with models of motherhood, though – it offers us images of women and men who are obedient to God. Hannah is not simply a woman wanting a child – she is a prayerful servant of the Lord and a prophet. In her prayer (in the following chapter) she gives voice to a whole people and points to the anointing of David as king. Her son, still a small child at this moment, is Samuel, who will anoint first Saul and then David. Like Mary, who said “yes” because she saw the promise of salvation, and the nameless woman who saved Moses by risking losing him, Hannah recognised God's faithfulness – and she put her trust in God.

These biblical mothers are not role models for motherhood – they are models for all men and women. Trust in God, who is faithful. ☺

Faithful God, you know our need before we ask it and hear the longings of our heart. Teach us to trust you, to know you as our strength, and to tell out your greatness to our children's children, now and for ever more. Amen.

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

As a discipline, rather than give up chocolate or anything else, I've taken up listening to the morning sounds as I do my chores. The dawn chorus is over by the time I go out but there are still blackbirds singing and crows cawing. A ewe has started making tiny muttering noises as she talks to her as-yet unborn lambs and they will know her voice when they're born and the conversation continues. The

trees are still quite bare though there are buds breaking but no leaf noise here yet. Of course the hens, ducks, piglets and dogs are using their loud voices to welcome the food being poured into their bowls.

This is my morning meditation and it could be yours too, whether you live in city, town or countryside. God listens and we listen and we do it together, and it is very good. ☺



Things you wished you knew about church history

Part 1 – Christendom

by Stephen Backhouse

Constantine did not inaugurate Christendom. The last emperor of an undivided Roman empire was Theodosius I, who came to power in AD 379. He was a staunch supporter of orthodox Christianity, which had been the privileged – but not established – religion of the Roman Empire since 313. In 380 Theodosius issued an edict that made Christianity official and deviation from the Nicene Creed illegal. Heresy was outlawed and many pagan temples were destroyed or forcibly converted into

churches. Yet then, as now, the relationship between Church and state was ambivalent. When Theodosius killed over seven thousand Thessalonian citizens in retribution for a seditious riot in 390, an outraged Bishop Ambrose castigated him for his harshness. Theodosius publicly acknowledged his guilt and submitted to the penance. This marked the first time in history that an imperial power had bowed to the authority of the Church, demonstrating the strength of Ambrose's maxim: “The emperor indeed is within the Church, not above the Church.” ☺

“There's something about it that makes sense, Lent. You give something up, and everything's more joyful.”

Elaine Stritch (1925-2014), actress, singer and comedian