

## Mother's Day Reflection

May 9, 2021

Social media is a great way to stay connected with friends and family. Through it we are able to share stories and photos, with people we love near and far. As Mother's Day approaches people post images, thoughts, stories, and reflections about the women who have raised us, nurtured us, taught us, maybe even disciplined us, not that many of us needed it. These women are our mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, aunts, sisters, mentors, and friends. Mothers, be they biological, foster, adoptive or surrogate, give us life and love. Many times, their presence is missing in photos, as they are often the ones taking the pictures and yet we know they exist, they must. We would not be here without them. The fact of the matter is that no one has entered this world without first being knit together in their mother's womb. Even our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ is born of a woman. Her name is Mary. Today, however, I am going to turn our attention to a mother of the Old Testament.

I am drawn to the story of God's pursuit of God's chosen people Israel as told in the Old Testament. In reading the Old Testament we meet the great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and learn of the promise God made to Abraham to make him the father of many nations; blessing him and his offspring through the generations. But let us face it Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could not become fathers without the women who bore their children. Abraham had Sarah, Isaac had Rebekah, and well Jacob had Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah (read Genesis 29-30). These are the women who will bear the offspring of Abraham. These are the women through whom God's covenantal promise begins to be fulfilled.

In our scripture reading for today we read about another woman. Her name is not given. She is simply identified as the wife of Manoah. She is a woman, barren, and therefore without child but she is not to remain this way. She will conceive and have a son. This unnamed woman is visited twice by a man of God. On his first visit the woman is given the news that she will conceive a son despite her barren condition. She is told not to defile her body with wine, strong drink or foods that are unclean for she is going to conceive a child, who she will name Samson. From his birth to his death Samson is consecrated to be a nazirite. A nazirite is someone who has dedicated their life to be consecrated for a divine purpose. The book of Numbers chapter six verses 1-21 outline the vows a man or woman takes when they become a nazirite.

The birth of a son will be significant for the woman. First, not only will she bear a child, but he has been chosen by God to be a nazirite from his birth. This woman, whose name we do not know, will be entrusted to raise her son from birth to be one that is consecrated before God to save his people. Secondly, there is the shame that is attached to being unable to bear a child for her husband. In this way she cannot fulfill her duties as his wife. But God has shown favor on her and she will be barren no longer.

The woman goes to her husband Manoah and tells him the news that she has been given. We are going to have a baby, she tells her husband, and he is to be set apart by God for the divine purpose of God. Upon hearing this news, the husband prays to God to send the messenger once again. Manoah needs guidance and instruction from God on how to raise their son his wife is to conceive. Although it is the husband who summons the angel of the Lord, the man of God appears once again before the woman. It is she who has been given the task of raising their son as a nazirite and therefore it is she whom the angel appears before. Because her husband is not present, she goes to get him to bring before the man of God. The angel tells the Manoah it is to be as he has instructed the wife. No further instruction is given.

We do not know the name of Manoah's wife but what we do know is that she has been given an important task. Before Samson can ever save his people from their enemies he must learn to walk and talk. He must learn also learn the ways of the Lord, and what it means to be a nazirite. His mother is the one who must teach him these ways. Her task did not begin at his birth but at his conception. Her body was to be presented as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, before the Lord. It was not only her son's life that was dedicated to God but her own. If she was going to teach her son to walk in the ways of the Lord, she herself must do so also.

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Motherhood can take on many different forms and can happen when least expected. Whatever form it takes, it is a commitment, a dedication of one's life to another. When we celebrate a child's baptism in church, we make a vow that we will journey with that child as they grow. We make a promise that we will *guide and nurture the child by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of Christ's church.* We as women of the church, we are called to be mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts promising to nurture to this child, in faith, as they grow. We are promising to share what we have learned as we ourselves have dedicated our lives before God.

As a little girl I remember growing up in church the oldest women of the church were referred to as mothers of the church. These were the gray haired old ladies (you know the ones, as a child you would swear they must have known Jesus personally and in many ways they did. They knew not only the inner workings of the church but also all of the gossip too. They were the keepers of wisdom. If you took the time to listen, they would tell you how God carried them through life. They would not have made it otherwise. Even though some of these women did not have children, they took on the role of mothers to us all within the church. They nourished and nurtured in us in faith. One such gray-haired lady taught the children's choir. Her name was Cordelia Carter. She has long since passed now. She was 93 years young, when she died. She was stern but loving, caring and kind. She insisted that we learn the music for Sunday morning service. We were not only to memorize the words but to internalize them, to feel them.

I would stay and help her clean up after rehearsals. She would offer me food from her meals that she had delivered from Meals on Wheels. I developed a love for music because of her and to this day music feeds my soul like nothing else can. Although her own children were grown, she was called to be a mother to others, well beyond her child rearing years. She nourished my body and nurtured by soul.

I imagine that was the case for the woman who become Samson's mother. She nourished his body from birth and taught him how to internalize his calling as a nazirite, as best as one can teach such a thing. I wonder if Mary, mother of Jesus, heard the story of this unnamed woman. Afterall, she would understand better than anyone what this mother is experiencing. I suppose it is what any women called to motherhood experience to some degree. Parenting is a journey, traveling the road with another as they seek to hopefully become who they are called to be. We do not know the name of Manoah's wife but perhaps we know her story. She could be our mothers, our sister, our neighbor, our friend, or ourselves; called to motherhood perhaps at an unexpected time or in an unexpected way or given the unexpected task of raising a child who has been set apart by God. Today as we celebrate Mother's Day let us thank God for the women in our lives who walk this journey of called life with us, for their love, guidance, courage, discipline, and sacrifices. To God be the glory for the things they have done in our lives and the lives of others. Amen.