



Saturday 19th December Reflection No. 246

Today we reflect on two stories from scripture with similar themes. From the book of Judges, we have the story of Manoah's wife who was barren until she was unexpectedly visited by an angel. This event was in some way "terrible." Whether the image of the angel was terrible or the event was frightening in a terrible way is unclear to me. This unnamed angel announces to the unnamed woman that she will bear a son even though she had yet to bear any children. Surprise! Our gospel story is similarly themed. Though the revelation came to Zechariah from the angel Gabriel. Elizabeth, who is old and until this point, childless, is told she too will bear a son. Surprise! There is no mention that either woman had been praying for a child. Both believed themselves to be barren, unable to have children. These two things would contribute to the Surprise! messages from the angel(s). This theme of Surprise! out of a state of barrenness truly spoke to me today.

My prayer recently has been filled with images of rocks and deserts. I don't like being in the desert – spiritually. It is a scary, lonely place. But these stories have given me pause to reflect on our God of Surprises. I have been invited to remember that, even out of apparent lifelessness, new life can come. Even though we may not be feeling/experiencing the love and life of God at this moment, God is present, always, even in the

barren deserts of our lives. I hear an invitation to hold on to hope and wait for the new life.

I don't want to gloss over the yuckiness that desert times can be. They can be places of loneliness, dryness, a sense of being lost, maybe a sense of abandonment. But if we can hold onto the deep knowing of "God with us," Immanuel, new life will come. Surprise!

My last thought about our God of Surprises is to ask, What is our response when we are surprised? Do we respond with a sense of "terrible" like the wife of Manoah? Do we respond with a sense of doubt like Zechariah? Or do we respond as Elizabeth, with gratitude and recognition of God's action in our lives for our good?

As we are approaching the close of this Advent Season of waiting, let's spend some time contemplating our experiences of desert times, new life and our God of Surprises! We can ask, How (where in my life) is God inviting me to wait in hope for new life?

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