

Hagar & Ishmael

Wednesday 25th November 2020



Saint Basil once gave a beautiful reflection concerning God's care for us through His angels. He wrote:

**'Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd
leading him to life.'**

In our biblical journey today we encounter the angel of the Lord doing just as Saint Basil described – protecting and shepherding. The two chapters we are looking at are Genesis 16 and 21. As always let us invoke the aid of God the Holy Spirit.

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**Come, O Holy Spirit,
and fill us with the gifts of knowledge and wisdom.
Strengthen us, we pray, with heavenly grace,
so that we may grasp with our minds,
treasure in our hearts,
and carry out in our deeds,
all the teachings of your Holy Book
which lead to salvation.
Amen.**

Patience is a virtue, so the saying goes. However, waiting can be tiresome and frustrating and though God had promised Abram that he would be the father of many descendants, in fact as many as the stars in the sky, Sara his wife became impatient.

***'So Sara said to Abram, 'Listen, now! Since the Lord God has kept me from having children, go to my slave girl. Perhaps I shall get children through her.' Abram agreed to what Sara had said.'* (Gn. 16:2)**



Hagar conceived a child by Abram successfully but Sara began to feel that her servant was getting above her station and being disrespectful towards her. After all, Hagar had done what her mistress had been unable to do. This as you will have read infuriated Sara who brought her grievance to her husband and was given the response:

***“Very well,’ Abram said to Sara ‘your slave girl is at your disposal. Treat her as you think fit.”* (Gn. 16:6)**

Hagar was unable to take the bad treatment that she received at the hands of Sara and ran away. During her escape she met the angel of the Lord who called her by her name. In God’s eyes Hagar was not a slave or an outcast but a daughter who like all His creation was precious in His eyes and valued. Through the angel, God gave Hagar the same promise that he gave Abraham, saying that she would be the mother of a great nation and that she should return to the home of Abram and Sara.

***‘Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave to the son that Hagar bore the name Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.’* (Gn.16:15–16)**

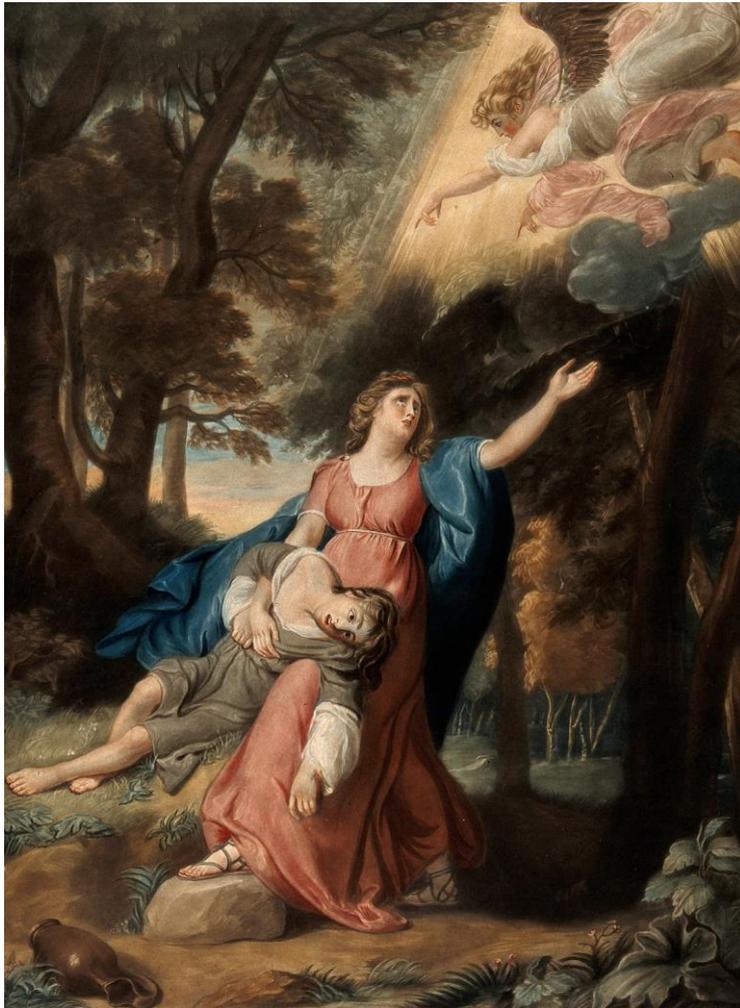
The name Ishmael means *'God hears'*. No doubt when Abram called his son this name he honestly thought the Lord had heard his cries of hope for a son and had fulfilled His promise to begin making Abram's descendants as many as the stars. However, if Abram and Sara had been a little more patient they would soon see how God was really going to fulfil His promise. By reading chapter 21 you will have already seen that God's promise became a reality in the miracle of Isaac.



'The Lord dealt kindly with Sara as he had said, and did what he had promised her. So Sara conceived and bore a son to Abram in his old age, at the time God had promised.' (Gn. 21:1-2)

All initially seemed well in the patriarch's household. Hagar had Ishmael and Sara had Isaac, however, this peace was not to last. When Sara saw Ishmael playing with Isaac she demanded that Abram dismiss her slave girl and child from their home. She was worried that Isaac may not receive his father's full inheritance and would have to share with Ishmael if they remained attached to the household. Abram was reluctant to throw Hagar and their son out of his house because after all Ishmael was his first born. The Lord reassured him that all would be well and Abram prepared some provisions for Hagar and Ishmael to take with them on their journey into the wilderness. However, disaster strikes –

'When the skin of water was finished she abandoned the child under a bush. Then she went and sat down at a distance, about a bowshot away, saying to herself, 'I cannot see the child die'. So she sat at a distance; and the child wept and wailed.'
(Gn. 21:15–16)



Yet again God sent His angel when Hagar needed help. This angel of the Lord revealed God's mercy and loving plan. He opened Hagar's eyes so that she could see a well to fetch water and revive her son as well as reminding her of the promise He had made. *'... I will make him in to a great nation.'* (Gn. 21:18) Through Ishmael, Abram is seen as the father of the Arab peoples and the patriarch for Islam. There is a shrine associated with Abram and Ishmael that Muslims consider to be an important place called Kaaba.

As time passed Ishmael grew up to become a mighty warrior and married an Egyptian woman. His descendants became so great that they formed 12 tribes. Not the 12 tribes of Israel but the 12 tribes who were to be the enemies of Israel. (see Gn. 25)

Life can be brutal and hard. There are times when we find ourselves confronting unexpected situations and having to engage with events that are beyond our control. Hagar had to suffer the injustices of her mistress because of jealousy and suspicion; Sara had to deal with the crisis of faith that maybe God was not going to fulfil His promise of giving her children; and Abram had to wrestle with his conscience through an emotional minefield of worry and anxiety about his family. The common thread of hope that weaved its way throughout the ups and downs of Abram, Sara and Hagar's lives was God Himself. Without Him there was no hope, there was no light at the end of the tunnel, there was no future.

As we saw a few weeks ago in the solemn covenant that the Lord made with Abram, He promised to be his God and make his descendants as many as the stars in the sky. This hope was made real in God's gift of Isaac. Hagar found herself an outcast and refugee with no future. God gave her hope in the ministrations of His angel who not only helped with her practical needs, but also promised her a family, a future and a hope that would be made real in Ishmael and his descendants. Finally Sara who saw her world disintegrating with no sign of children and a slave ousting her from her position was given the concrete hope in God's gift of her son Isaac.

Brothers and sisters know that whatever predicament or situation we find ourselves in, the Lord God is never far away. He sends His angels to watch over us, His saints to pray for us and His Son Jesus Christ to be with us, for all time.

***'Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food, or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked.'* (Rm. 8:35)**

God Bless and keep praying

Fr. O'Brien