

Who are your models of motherhood?

The Scriptures – both the Old and New Testaments – are filled with stories of faith-filled mothers. These ancient women faced some of the same challenges and felt many of the same emotions that mothers feel today.

Sarah: Waiting for a Child

In the Book of Genesis we meet Sarah, the wife of Abraham and (eventual) mother of Isaac. Sarah has been unable to bear children and both she and her husband are very advanced in years. Even so, God promises that Sarah will have a child. Sarah bursts into laughter when she hears this, one can only assume from maternal joy and disbelief. When Isaac is born, Sarah says, “God has given me cause to laugh, and all who hear it will laugh with me” (21:6).

Rebekah: Mother of Twins

Later in Genesis we read that Isaac marries Rebekah, who is well into midlife and also unable to bear children. So Isaac prays to the Lord to send them a child, and Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins. We read that “the children in her womb jostled each other so much that she exclaimed, ‘If this is to be so, what good will it do to me!’” (25:22). God foretells to Rebekah that her sons will quarrel and that the older son will eventually serve the younger. She gives birth to Esau and Jacob, who jostle for position in the family lineage for much of their lives.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Even though Mary is troubled by the visit from the angel Gabriel, she says “yes” to the daunting prospect of carrying and giving birth to the Son of the Most High, Jesus. Mary is

very young and afraid, yet her great faith gives her the courage to respond, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Throughout the Gospels we hear that Mary is present in Jesus' life. When he gets lost in the Temple, she must be worried sick. She asks him to fix the wine shortage at Cana. And she endures the intense suffering that no mother should; she is present at the cross when Jesus is crucified.

Elizabeth: Prophetic Voice

Elizabeth becomes the mother of John the Baptist. The Gospel of Luke tells us that she is advanced in years and has struggled to have children for much of her life. Elizabeth warmly welcomes her relative, Mary, into her house. Upon Mary's arrival, the baby leaps in Elizabeth's womb, and she proclaims: "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (1:42-43).