

With sensitivity to the current phenomenon of stating your preferred personal pronoun in your e-mail sign off, I don't imagine that a contemporary angel would go about (his/her/its) messaging in quite the manner that the announcing angel told the news of Sarah's forthcoming pregnancy in our Old Testament reading. Indeed, to announce to Abraham, rather than Sarah, that a child would be born to 'one who was barren in her old age', would hardly be regarded as politically correct or pastorally sensitive.

But this story is full of intriguing cautions- is it three men who appear, or one man; is it a human or divine messenger; why do the lectionary compilers cut us off mid-story when the very next verse

contains the punch-line- Sarah laughs- the word laughed in Hebrew, being the same as Isaac, the name of the long desired child.

The Gospel story too is intriguing- a woman welcomes Jesus into her home- custom would after all dictate that her brother Lazarus did the inviting, the distracted Martha seems to scurry around leaving Mary to lap up the wisdom of their guest's teaching and then, despite Martha having been the one to invite Jesus in to supper- it is she who seems to be put in second place to her indolent sister- Mary has chosen the better part.

What can these stories have to say to us in 2022 when social mores are so different, in Western

Europe, not ancient Palestine, in an age when equal numbers of men and women applied for the leadership of the conservative party and hence for the premiership. What do they say specifically as we gather to baptise Bo, Hayes and Paul into life within the body of Christ? And why in Luke's gospel with all its emphasis on 'diakonein' - serving- does Jesus seem to favour contemplation over action?

Sarah, in our OT reading, emerges from the shadow of the tent, just in time to overhear the promise- presumably it is she who has been bearing the brunt of preparing the meal for the guests, after all, so busy that there's no time to think of the ludicrous notion of pregnancy now- far too tired tonight Abraham. I can imagine that for Adam and Miranda, Simon and Samantha, as for so many of

us, the daily circus of attempting to balance childcare, housework, professional lives, neighbourliness and some leisure time seems impossible- so contemplation goes to the bottom of the to do list.

So where do we take these stories- The clue- I believe, does come in Luke's central tenet of his Gospel about service. The point is surely that christian service begins in listening and hearing, accepting the invitation to follow Christ, and demands integrity and wholeness in response. Yes, it requires all the busyness of the parish office team, as well as the stillness of Morning Prayer – both going on each day in St Luke's. It requires of us individually a commitment to listen and respond, in

stillness and in action, irrespective of every difference between us- age, gender, sexuality, economic status, background. Each of us is called to Mary's listening role as well as to Martha's activism. Each of us is called to hear the promise of God, whether as first recipient, like Abraham or hiding in the shadows of our tents of busyness- be they work or social.

And baptising Bo and Hayes and Paul today we cannot know where their paths will take them. We don't even know who our PM will be in September, let alone how life will span out for these children of God being baptised. What we can know is that the call of the Gospel- be it through the message or hospitality or through self- reflection and contemplation, is for everyone, The command to

follow Jesus Christ, in which we are trusting this morning, both in baptism and in receiving bread and wine, is for all. Ours is to respond of ourselves and to pass on the invitation to others through lives transformed by the outpouring of God's hospitality in calling and embracing us, just as we are- young, old, rich, poor, It matters not- for love of God always includes love of neighbour, he, she or them.