

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) The shepherds went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in a manger.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 104)

ANTIPHON: The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

RESPONSE: The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

LECTOR: Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. O sing to him, sing his praise; tell all his wonderful works! **R.**

LECTOR: Be proud of his holy name, let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice. Consider the Lord and his strength; constantly seek his face. **R.**

LECTOR: Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, the judgements he spoke. O children of Abraham, his servant, O sons of the Jacob he chose. **R.**

LECTOR: He remembers his covenant for ever, his promise for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, and the fullness of his message live within you. Alleluia!

(Or)

Alleluia, alleluia! In the past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets; now he speaks to us through his Son. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Our God has appeared on the earth, and lived among us.

TODAY'S READINGS Sir 3: 2-6, 12-14; Col 3: 12-21; Luke 2:22-40

NEXT WEEK (Epiphany, Year B) Isaiah 60:1-6, Psalm 71; Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

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Hidden treasures



(L to R) Dorothy Vaughan, Katherine Johnson and Mary Jackson **31 December 2023 Holy Family Year B**

Many would have seen the 2016 movie, "Hidden Figures," which focused on the roles of three African American women mathematicians - Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson - who worked at NASA during the Mercury program. Few would have known how these three women played crucial roles in the success of John Glenn's historic spaceflight.

The film highlights their struggles against racial and gender discrimination while contributing significantly to the US space program during the early 1960s. It is a powerful portrayal of their achievements and the challenges they faced in a segregated society. In today's gospel, we encounter two other "hidden" women, whose contribution to the Jesus' story is often overlooked or underestimated.

Mary, Jesus' mother is well known; but her role is often glossed over with pious niceties and elevated titles, which tell us very little about her true strength of character. In the opening chapters of Luke, Mary accepts a divine call to be the mother of Jesus, embarks on perilous quests to fulfil that vocation, and embraces a challenging vision of a coming end time revolution when paupers will displace kings.

Similarly, the elderly widow and seer, Anna, appears exercising matriarchal privilege and prophetic authority. Luke tells us that for many decades she "never left the temple, where she worshiped with fasting and prayer night and day" (Lk 2:37). This description implies that her role as a prophetess involved both religious and

political activity. It is significant that she carries out this role in the Temple, the Jewish centre not only of social, political, and religious life, but also end time expectations. Like Mary, Anna "began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were expecting the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38).

Anna and Mary lived in a society with its own set of challenges and expectations. As wives and mothers, one would normally expect them to be portrayed as homemakers concerned with cooking, cleaning, clothing, and childrearing. In the first century, a Jewish woman could exercise considerable freedom in domestic affairs, including managing servants in larger households. In the absence of a male authority, either through the death of her husband or other factors, a woman could govern her own affairs.

But women did not normally exercise authority in the public sphere. Even the privileged wives, widows and daughters of nobles and powerful officials could only aspire to employing influence within their immediate circles of friends and family.

Anna's very public allegiance to her faith and Mary's heroic role in pursuing her vocation were remarkable acts that broke societal norms. Anna and Mary showed strength and resilience in the face of the ruling patriarchy and, ultimately, had a substantial impact on the subsequent events of history.

Ian J Elmer
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