



Obstacles in Women's Healthcare and Health Education: How the Church Can Advocate for Women

Tapestry Justice for Women 2024

Devotion for the Week of November 10, 2024

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Often women find themselves pregnant in complicated situations. Having a child out of wedlock has often been looked upon in a negative way. Who among us has not felt contempt for another person or suffered in some seemingly hopeless circumstance? Women who found themselves unmarried and pregnant became stigmatized. Many thought it to be socially and morally wrong. Have our biases resulted in how we treat women who are pregnant and unmarried?

When Mary became pregnant, Joseph did not know what to do. He thought about abandoning her. After all, their relationship had not been consummated so how could this child be his? Jewish law considered pregnancy out of wedlock to be adultery. This was punishable by death or shame and required divorce. Mary felt shame and uncertainty. While Joseph contemplated divorce, God's divine intervention rose from Joseph's uncertainty. In Matthew 1: 18-25, God intervened through an angel in a dream to tell Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. The angel told Joseph that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and that Joseph should name the child Jesus, who would save his people from their sins. Joseph's faith and obedience to God made him do what was right. How could this play out differently today? If Mary walked into our worship service today, how would she be treated? I imagine being met with stares and whispers. Perhaps not. As a society, have we become more tolerant and caring of unwed mothers? Attitudes towards illegitimacy and how we respond are deeply rooted in social conditioning. Does God's word tell us a different story?

Think about Hagar. Would we see her as some also see Mary: a disgraced, unwed, sinful woman? An angel appeared and brought great news to Hagar (Genesis 16). The angel ensured protection and provision for Hagar and her baby. Amid her pain and struggle, Hagar receives God's blessings and promises. Hagar, a non-Israelite woman with no power or status, is the first person in Scripture to be visited by an angel and the only person in Scripture to give God a name—El Roi, "the God who sees me."





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Hagar, as Mary, was not alone. God saw them through divine eyes full of grace. God understood their lives' predicament, eased their fears, and gave them a hopeful future. This is all good news for those of us who are less than perfect, who wander in desert places, who weep over the consequences of our own decisions, and who are victims of ridicule or rejection. Among those such as Hagar and Mary, Jesus is to be found, ready to meet us at the place of despair when it seems that God is absent or that God's promises are false. God comes to us in wilderness places.

God's interaction with Mary and Hagar shows God's loving kindness. We as Christians should see these women and those today who find themselves with unintended pregnancies as God's children and deserve to be accepted as God has taught us to love thy neighbor as ourselves.

Heavenly Father, show us how to care for and support women who struggle with an unintended pregnancy. Father God, we thank you for every woman you have blessed with the privilege of motherhood. Lord, you know the individual circumstances of each woman, let us provide hope and comfort and share your grace with them. As a church, we will let them know they are not alone, and you have not forsaken them. We pray and ask these in your name. Amen

Reflection Questions:

- Have our biases impacted the way we treat women who are unmarried and pregnant?
- If Mary or Hagar walked into our worship service today, how would they be treated?
- Does God's word tell us a different story?

