

Ageing

In the Bible, there is often a tension between the human view of growing old as a progressive enfeeblement, loss of potential, weariness and preparation for death, and the dynamic, God's-eye-view of all human persons as capable of being partners in the divine will and intention.

Perhaps the most obvious example which springs to mind, is the bringing of children to women considered too old for child-bearing. In Genesis 17:17 and 18:11-15, Abraham and his wife Sarah find God's word that they will have a son completely ridiculous, laughable. But God does indeed choose this unlikely couple to bring Isaac into the world. What appears to us physically impossible, will not stand against the loving purposes of God.



Photo by Leroy Allen Skalstad

<http://www.morguefile.com/forum/profile.php?username=leroys>

This story is paralleled in Luke 1:7 when a son is given to Elisabeth and Zacharias, once again against all expectations and likelihood. This child is John the Baptist, whose role is to prepare the world for that other person of extraordinary and unlooked for birth: Jesus. It is perhaps because of this idea that God gives special gifts to those people of wisdom and experience that others think have 'had their day' that one Christian tradition that Joseph was an old man, arose.

Ageing, then, can be seen as a process of increasing opportunity to hear and respond to God's call and to witness to all God has done. So it is then, that the aged are also prophets of the truth of God's promises, as we see in the words of Simeon and Anna when the Christ-Child comes into the world. It is when we are sure we have seen and done all God wants of us that we can say 'Lord, lettest then thy servant depart in peace'.