

The Misereor Lenten Veil “Biblical Women — Guides to the Kingdom of God”



THE STRUCTURE OF THE PAINTING — CONTEMPLATION LEADING TO ACTION

The central scene is a mandala inviting us to go on an “inward journey” as we meditate on the growing of the Kingdom of God. The biblical figures presented in the other six scenes can be our guides and companions on our “outward journey” to the poor, the oppressed, and forgotten.

<p>2 Miriam Ex 15.19—21</p>	<p>3 Shiphrah and Puah Ex 1.15—21</p>	<p>4 Ruth 1.22; 2.8; 4.13—17</p>
<p>7 Mary Magdalene Jn 20.11—18</p>	<p>1 The Kingdom of God is like a leaven and like a seed of mustard (Lk 13.21,18—19) “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth . . .” (Jn 12.24)</p>	<p>5 Mary and Elizabeth Lk 1.41—56</p>
<p>6 The Canaanite woman Mk 7.25—30; Mt 15.22—28</p>		

1 THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A LEAVEN

A woman is sitting in a grain of wheat, mixing leaven into the flour and kneading the dough to make bread. Ears of wheat have sprung up from the earth and are growing towards the light. This is a symbolic image of the Kingdom of God, which is “like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour” (Lk 13.21) and “like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden” (Lk 13.19). The artist here also alludes to the daily hardship and toil of the women in India, who, although among the poorest of the poor, have to ensure the survival of their families. At the same time, her painting invites us to look for God’s seed in our own everyday lives so that by our concern for the poor and the oppressed we may contribute to making real the message of His Kingdom. The open-ended seed signifies that the growing of God’s Kingdom is also a process of passing through death to bring about new life: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12.24).



2 MIRIAM-PROPHETESS AND SISTER

Miriam, the prophetess and sister of Moses and Aaron, is celebrating the liberation of her people from their Egyptian oppressors: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea” (Ex 15.21). The other women join in by dancing around her, thus expressing their solidarity and love towards each other and the community. Water is of course a predominant element in this scene; it is also meant to remind us of the physical hardship facing the women in India as they often have to walk many miles for a pot of water. The example of Miriam should challenge her sisters today to fully use their abilities and realize their potential.

3 SHIPHRAH AND PUAH — EFFECTIVE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

This scene is marked by the contrast between a dark, fiery background and the warming

light surrounding two women in green and red saris who are protecting a mother and her baby. The two midwives Shiphrah and Puah withstand and defy the ordinance of the Pharaoh, saving the newborn males of the Hebrews by a bold strategy. With their wisdom and ingenuity, they can be a great example and help to all women fighting for life, freedom, justice, and peace against “Pharaonic” threats of death.

4 RUTH — HARMONY OF FAMILY, SOCIETY AND NATURE

A painting showing a group of three people, the dark-skinned Ruth, her mother-in-law Naomi, and Boaz. It is a scene full of harmony, a precious testimony of the vision of men and women relating to each other in love, care, and concern. Two women, differing in age, but both poor, childless and homeless, one of them a foreigner, hold together and renew the people of Israel. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz seem to be somehow linked by the gleanings of wheat, a reference to the worldwide concern for the daily bread.

5 MARY AND ELIZABETH — GOD EXALTS THE LOWLY

The artist has created an unusual representation of the Visitation scene. Elizabeth, clearly pregnant, is dancing towards Mary, who praises God in the Magnificat: “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away” (Lk 1.52-53). Mary thus reveals her son’s message of the coming Kingdom of God. Reversing the usual order of things, this God cares especially for the lowly, the hungry, the downtrodden and the exploited.

6 JESUS AND THE CANAANITE WOMAN

The Canaanite Woman is pleading with Jesus to heal her daughter who is tormented by a demon. At first, Jesus does not respond to her wish and says “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15.24). However, by persisting in her demand and pointing out that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table, she finally wins his compliance, and her daughter is healed. The artist here also refers to the situation in India, where often the life of a girl is not considered to be of great worth; and she wants to encourage all those who persist in their demands and try to do everything possible to make sure that “borders” of whatever kind remain open.

7 MARY OF MAGDALA

The artist shows Mary Magdalene as a radiant woman in red, the colour of love, as she comes from the light of the risen Lord to bring the good news to the disciples who are still in the dark and in fear. “Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her” (Jn 20.18). What is particularly remarkable in this story is the great courage Mary shows by going to the tomb, her loving persistence as she is looking for his body, and the fact that Jesus gives her the mission to tell his disciples the good news of his resurrection. It was this mandate to proclaim the good news that caused St. Augustine to call her “apostle of the apostles”.

THE BACKGROUND

"The role of the women in the process of development" is the theme of the 1990/91 Misereor Lenten Campaigns. The women are the ones who are hardest hit by the still worsening situation of poverty and want in the countries of the so-called Third World. However, a more just and peaceful world will be possible only if the women can fully participate in all sectors of society on a basis of self-responsibility and equal rights. This is the view taken by our overseas project partners.

THE MESSAGE

As believers we are challenged to discover the God-given dignity and vocation of the women, and to find out and put into practice what a redeemed relationship between women and men should look like. The scenes of this Lenten Veil show women from the Old and New Testaments whose manifold experiences of God can be good news for the world of today and for our own personal lives.

THE THEME

Jesus preached the gospel of God and said: „The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel“ (Mk 1.15). And he „did not speak to them without a parable“ (Mk 4.34). The central scene of this Lenten Veil is a symbolic representation of the parable of the Kingdom of God (see Lk 13.21) and 13.19). The small and hidden grows and yields fruit

in abundance. God becomes man in the humbleness of his son and in the ordinariness of everyday life (Cardinal Martini). The biblical women depicted in this Lenten Veil exemplify and illustrate the good news brought to the pilgrim people of God, the Gospel of His Kingdom which is already close at hand.

The Indian artist Lucy D'Souza



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