

of Tamar (although she behaved like a prostitute) after being denied her due rights as a widow under the Law. As Perez would be the ancestor of David and the Royal Kings of Israel, the lesson is that all children are loved by God irrespective of their background, and none should be denied their opportunity to life **whatever the circumstances of their conception**.

Obed was the great grandfather of David. Obed's mother, Ruth, was not a Jewess but a Moabite who came to be blest by God because of her love and loyalty to Naomi, the mother of her first husband. The story is a powerful message against inter-racial prejudice, and again emphasises that no negative judgement should ever be made against any child, because God has guided their creation.

The **first son born to David and Bathsheba** was conceived after David had murdered Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, so that he could marry her. His sin is punished by the death of the child despite David pleading to God to spare it. Although this may seem an unjust way for God to act towards an innocent child, the story's prime purpose is to show how evil can not go unpunished. However, there is an important secondary lesson in the story: as a gift from God, a gift that may still be given despite evil circumstances, the death of a child (which is shown as always tragic and painful) must always be accepted as part of God's plan. The subsequent birth of **Solomon** to David and Bathsheba reinforces this idea of the mystery of God's love and providence. The moral behind David's story is repeated in a different way in the case of the **Shunammite woman**. Despite the advanced age of her husband, God gives her the gift of a child as a reward for her kindness towards his prophet Elisha. The death of this child, the woman's grief and the miracle of the child being brought back to life all reflect how important children are, what they should always mean to us, and the total trust and dependence we must always have on God even when they are (prematurely for us) taken from us.



Important Conclusions

In the New Testament there are, of course, also the miraculous births of John the Baptist and Jesus, with similar emphasis on the power of God over all life. The Incarnation, very importantly, reveals to us that human life begins at **conception**.

The overall theology of these biblical passages, a very deep and relevant theology, is that children may biologically be thought of as the product of the union of male and female (Gen. 1:28) but they are really a **gift** given us by God. Each and every conceived soul is important to God and has a **holy purpose**, and we would well recognise this by doing all we can to nurture and protect that innocent life from its very first moment. Conversely, no matter how tragic the death of a child, its very existence **has** served God's purpose and its loss should be accepted no matter the pain felt. God has simply received back what was his gift to us in the first place.

Our Catholic Faith

8. The Birth of a Child is a Sign of God's Love

- *A Blessed Gift from God*



Questions for

Reflection

1. What does God's demand for the sacrifice of Isaac teach us?
2. What is the significance of the several bible accounts where children are born of 'barren' women?
3. Why did God treat the illicit union of Judah and Tamar differently from that of David and Bathsheba?

The Old Testament Perspective

The Old Testament makes it abundantly clear that no one has an automatic right to have children - life is a gift from God: **“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I shall return. The Lord gives and the Lord takes back”** (Job.1)

In expressing this view, the O.T. authors are holding to a truth that seems to have been forgotten by many in our society. Today, many women seem to assume two basic stances: **first**, that they have a right to have children when they please, and **second**, that they have the right to terminate ‘unwanted/accidental’ pregnancies. Both come under the very misguided banner ‘a woman’s right to choose’. Yet, for those who see in creation the work of a loving Creator, the truth is that all life ultimately comes as a gift from God and, conversely, no-one has the right to end the life of a child once it has been created. That is God’s prerogative only.

There are several key O.T. passages concerning the births of children that provide lessons for us today:

1. Cain born to Adam and Eve (Gen. 4)
2. Isaac to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17, 18 and 21)
3. Jacob and Esau to Isaac and Rebecca (Gen.25)
4. Joseph to Jacob and Rachel (Gen.30)
5. Perez and Zerah to Judah and Tamar (Gn.38)
6. Obed to Boaz and Ruth (Rt.4)
7. Samuel to Elkanah and Hanna (1 Sam.1)
8. David’s first and second sons with Bathsheba (2 Sa.12)
9. The son of the Shunnamite woman (2 K.4)



Before examining what is significant about these births, it is important at the outset to emphasise that no negative judgements are made or implied in these passages about the children themselves. The lessons the bible authors were inspired to convey relate to the **circumstances** of their births and the actions of their **parents**.

Actually, in this process it is assumed, as a fact that needs no emphasis, that **all** children are blessed, and are in a close relationship with God as their creator. This assumption should be no surprise to us given the story of creation, and Man’s elevated status in this process, that is given in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis. But it is clearly one that many in our society would do well to reflect more deeply about.

Children Are a Gift from God

The story of **Abraham** emphasise several times the power of God in giving the gift of a child: Abraham as a man of 100 years old was given a promise by God that he would have a child by his wife Sarah who was 90. He laughed at the

promise. Later, one of three guests who came to Abraham also made the same promise to Sarah. She laughed, too. Yet, the promise was fulfilled (Gn.21) and **Isaac** was born. The lesson is not just about the power of God and his love, it is about having trust in God in the face of apparently impossible odds and, above all, that a child is the greatest gift any couple can receive.



Later, Abraham is presented as being asked to sacrifice Isaac to God (Gn.22). This episode is often condemned by many people because they think it reveals the cruelty of God. But, in fact, it is the author’s way of revealing the **very opposite** and teaching his audience new lessons:

First, in a world where child sacrifice was the norm, it is his method of beginning to teach a new morality. This is a morality that recognises the innocence of children in the eyes of God, and has as its objective the outlawing of that abhorrent practice. The deliberate killing of any child is not acceptable to God.

Second, it shows that Abraham had complete faith in God over his much loved child. This shows that decisions about the welfare of children are not to be based on human social values, but on spiritual values, on God’s values.

The stories of Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, and Elkanah and Hanna restate the truth that the conception of children is one of God’s greatest personal gifts to us, and that each child has an important **purpose** to fulfil in God’s plan.. Rebecca and Rachel were ‘barren’, but Isaac’s prayer for his wife and Rachel and Hanna’s prayer for themselves, led to God’s intervention in blessing them with children. In Isaac’s case these were the twins **Jacob and Esau**, and the continuation of their story has the message that each child is unique, and no matter what their fate is they are all blessed by God, albeit to different degrees. In Rachel’s case it was **Joseph** and the purpose behind his story is to show how the Hebrews came to live in Egypt. Both of these stories also show the depth of potential evil within man, with sibling rivalry and jealousy not excluded. In Hanna’s case, her son was the great prophet, **Samuel** who would be the channel for God’s granting of a human King to rule over the Israelites.

Even the birth of **Cain**, who would grow up to be the first murderer, is pictured as a gift of God, as Eve says:

“ I have acquired a man with the help of Yahweh”

The lessons in the stories of Judah and Tamar, and Boaz and Ruth, have a different intention whilst preserving the belief in the value of all children and their unique relationship with God’s providence.



Perez and Zerah were the children of an immoral union between Judah and Tamar, but the nature of the story is presented as a tale of moral virtue on the part