

**W**hat do Ruth, Esther, Hagar, Sarah, Deborah, Mary Magdalene and the unnamed woman have in common? Each has a starring role at Sunday Evensong between the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July and the 3<sup>rd</sup> September (details on page 4 opposite).

At first glance biblical women may seem few and far between. In a society which we know was patriarchal and some would suggest repressive of women, the expectation is that they only used their gifts in the traditional roles of wives and mothers. However, if you look closely at the books of the Old Testament you will find some outstanding women, amongst them are leaders, thinkers, prophets and poets. Some take a front of stage role whilst others remain in the background but are no less effective. There are women who face the same difficulties that women face today, coping alone, struggling with the then stigma and heartache of being childless or facing the challenges of a large family.

---

**What I find most fascinating is that their gifts and characteristics are visible in women down the centuries, even to the present day**

---

The New Testament also features some remarkable women. Trace the life of Jesus in any of the gospels and there are women at every stage of the journey; from his birth to the young Mary; the joy of the prophetess Anna at the presentation in the Temple; the women who fol-



lowed Jesus alongside the disciples, were there at the foot of the Cross and the first witnesses to the risen Lord at the resurrection. Jesus' ministry was marked by a respect for women whatever their status in life.

What I find most fascinating about my studies of biblical women though is that their gifts and characteristics are visible in women down the centuries even to the present day.

I really hope that you will be able to come along on a Summer Sunday evening and discover this whole generation (spread over many centuries) of fascinating women, whom I value deeply, and then be able to identify them amongst your own family, friends and colleagues today.

If you'd like suggestions for further reading please contact me.

*Coralie*