

Wonder Women Then and Now!

Here we are at the beginning of another MWA year. Who would have known at the beginning of the Wonder Woman theme in 2019 what was to come during the next twelve months? I suppose the ultimate answer would be to find a vaccine, give it a feminine gender and then call it 'Wonder Woman.' However, that has not happened yet and we pray for the day when it does. Until then we are staying with the theme of Wonder Women and I thank all my sisters who have offered to write Devotional Papers during the coming months. I think the papers will not follow a particular plan but will stand alone in their own right, passing on a special message of how Wonder Women have changed or are still changing the world around them. Hopefully, change for the better will be one positive outcome from this pandemic.

One of the questions I offered for discussion in September 2019 was 'Do you agree that each one of us can be Wonder Women in some way?' I think Covid 19 has given us the answer - YES. However small and insignificant we may feel, I'm sure we have each helped, guided or supported someone in some way during the last few months. Going back in history, one woman who started life as an insignificant young girl became a leading figure in our Moravian missionary movement. Her name was Anna Nitschmann. Anna was born in 1715 and came from a long line of 'Nitschmanns', a family who were strongly religious and dedicated their lives to serving their Lord. Anna started life as a young shepherdess, but being surrounded by such religious fervour and emotion it is not surprising that she felt and followed the same calling. Her father and brother suffered greatly for their faith, both having been imprisoned on several occasions before they eventually left Kunwald in Moravia and settled in Herrnhut on Count Zinzendorfs' land. Anna grew up in this community and displayed a sweet, humble, compassionate, modest, yet wise, disposition. Yet Anna was not perfect. She struggled with doubts and periods of depression during her teenage years. However, eventually she was chosen in 1730, 'by lot', to be a Chief Eldress. Young though she was her only response was 'behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it according to Thy word'. Does that ring any bells? Anna, went on to mentor and counsel her sisters in the 'sisters' choir', many who were much older than her. She refused marriage twice firmly believing that her Saviour was her bridegroom. She lived through the Manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power in 1727 that we celebrate on 13 August every year, experienced the first Lovefeast Service, was part of the beginning of the 100 years Prayer Chain – the forerunner of our 'Prayer Watch' and attended Synods at that time. Although she never preached sermons in church, undoubtedly her prominent position at that time has influenced how Moravians have thought of women in the church in subsequent years. Her titles of 'Moravian Shepherdess of Souls', 'Handmaiden of the Lamb' and 'Mother of the Church' are very much deserved. In later life she first became maid and then close friend to Dorothea Zinzendorf and accompanied her and the Count on many of their missionary expeditions. Following Dorothea's death in 1754 Anna did marry Count Zinzendorf although nothing is recorded of her feelings for the Count. They both died within two weeks of each other in 1760. Truly a Wonder Woman of her time.

For Discussion

1. What can we learn from Anna's life? Can you make parallels in today's society?