



DATE: November 1 (22nd Sunday after Pentecost)
SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 17:1-24
TITLE: Elijah raises the widow's son

In most stores the change has already been made. Halloween is over, and thus it is time for Christmas. The orange and black, cats, ghosts, and haunted houses have been replaced with green and red, reindeer, Santas, and gingerbread houses. Yet in the Church we are not there yet. We still have a few weeks before Advent, and yet this text is a perfect “Pre-Advent” story.

It is good to review a story about Elijah, because Elijah has an interesting relationship with Jesus and the Gospels. Elijah looms large over the Gospels without ever actually appearing. Jesus references Elijah during his first public sermon (and the people want to throw him off a cliff as a response). Later in Luke, Jesus re-enacts Elijah’s act of raising a widow’s son.

Over the course of Jesus’ ministry both he and John the Baptist are called Elijah. When Jesus takes Peter, John, and James with him to the mountain, Jesus is transfigured and with him are Moses and Elijah. Even at the Cross, when Jesus cries out, people think he is calling Elijah.

To understand why Elijah pops up so much in the Gospels, you must understand what happened to Elijah after this story of him providing sustenance for the widow and raising her son to life. Elijah is remembered for this amazing act of sustenance and provision, but he is also remembered as the great champion of Yahweh who won victory over 450 prophets of Baal, and as the one who did not truly die but was raised up on a chariot of fire.

Stories of Elijah were told long after Scripture was completed. The folktales about Elijah were based on the fact that he was taken up and would some day

come back. In these stories Elijah was the defender of the struggling and persecuted. He defended the cause of Yahweh and saved the faithful. He was especially known as the one who was on the side of the poor and would point to the coming of the Messiah and a time when the struggle to survive would cease.

Even though he only showed up in a few chapters of the Hebrew Bible, he became an important figure in the hearts of the Jewish people.

Eventually traditions formed about Elijah returning. At the Passover supper, the fifth cup is known as the Elijah cup, and it is left untouched. At seder meals it is common to leave a door and a chair open—as an invitation to have Elijah join the family for the meal.

It is no surprise then, that when

Jesus came there was a little bit of a mix up. Jesus, the one who provided sustenance out of plenty, who healed the widow’s son, and stood firm in the face of a multitude of enemies, was much like the Elijah of Scripture and the Elijah of folktales.

This story of Elijah serves as a great pre-Advent text because it reminds us of the stories were told about the one who would come before the Messiah. As we wait for the coming of Jesus, we know that Elijah was the one who spoke truth the evil King—the one who strayed from God. Elijah was the one who found a poor gentile woman in a foreign land with a sick son. When the actions of the powerful brought drought and death, Elijah’s faith in God brought provisions and life.

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