

## ***“Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?”***

Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

When Abraham was 75 years old, God told him to leave his country and his home and go to the land of Canaan. God promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation, and that all people would be blessed through him and his descendants. Though Abraham was childless – he followed God's words – and moved with his wife and possessions to this strange and foreign land.

The Lord repeated His promise to Abraham – saying that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abraham trusted that what God said was true – even without evidence, and contrary to reason – and by that faith, he was declared righteous before God.

Fast forward to today's reading and Abraham is now 99 years old – and he and his wife, Sarah, still have no children. She is beyond the age of childbearing – and yet, old Abraham, is still clinging to the Lord's promise – even though it seems impossible.

Imagine how their faith must have been tested over those 24 years – trying to have children, waiting for the good news – but never hearing it. All their endless efforts must have seemed futile. You can understand why Sarah would laugh at the promise – but Abraham, the father of all believers, continues to hold on to God's Word.

Advent is all about that sort of waiting in humble faith. Not only did Abraham wait for the fulfillment of the promise – the people of Israel waited for the coming of the promised Messiah – and now we wait, for the fulfillment of the Messiah's salvation, on the Last Day when He will come again to judge, and take all believers to heaven.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas – Jesus' First Advent – His coming in the flesh and His Birth in Bethlehem – we take the time to meditate on the truth that much of the Christian life is characterized by waiting – living by faith, and looking forward in hope, to what is yet to come.

Waiting can be discouraging. It just takes ..... so long. Doubt begins to creep in. "Is the promise true – will it ever happen?" Our hearts, our flesh, have become used to immediate results and immediate gratification – waiting is just not something we desire to do – and so it's easy to dismiss the promises of our Lord, or push them aside.

Patient waiting goes against the grain of us sinners – but wait we must. So the Lord exhorts us through His psalmist: "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart ... I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His Word do I hope ... O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption."

The waiting was hard for Abraham and Sarah as well. But the Lord – in His grace, and in His time – comes to announce that the waiting is just about over.

Abraham quickly prepares a meal for his special guests – and it is in the context of eating that meal that the LORD promises one last time – "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."

In the same way, the angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream to announce Mary's pregnancy by the Holy Spirit. "She will bring forth a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." The waiting was almost over for the whole people of God as well – for the Advent of the Christ was near.

The Lord announces that both Sarah and Mary will give birth to children – but they do not react in the same way. Sarah hears this incredible good news, laughs, and says: "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"

Sarah's focus was entirely upon the impossibility of her and Abraham producing a child. Mary also wondered how she, a virgin, could possibly conceive a child – but when the angel explained that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit, she said – "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Mary responded in faith – not focusing on what was humanly possible – but upon God's Word, and what was divinely possible.

When confronted with her laughter, and in response to her denial – the Lord says to Sarah, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” The obvious answer is NO, nothing is too hard for the Lord. That’s what the Lord’s messenger says to Mary as well – “for nothing will be impossible with God.”

And so it came to pass, that 90 year-old Sarah gave birth to a son who would be the direct ancestor of the Promised Messiah – and a Virgin, named Mary, would give birth to that Messiah, to Jesus, the Savior of the world.

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Certainly not. Not miraculous births – nor saving poor, miserable sinners and giving them new and eternal life.

When Jesus’ own disciples, focused solely on man, asked “who then can be saved?” – Jesus answered, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” (Mk. 10:27). It is impossible for man to enter into the kingdom of God by his own strength, will, or character – but God makes the impossible possible, through Jesus Christ.

We poor sinners are saved by His holy birth among us. Though we are dead in our trespasses and sins, God makes us alive together with Christ through His death and resurrection. Nothing is too hard for the Lord – even the salvation of sinners, like us.

Abraham believed that nothing is impossible with God. Romans 4 says that Abraham “did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.”

God brought life out of death, and Sarah gave birth to a son. They called his name Isaac, which means, “he laughs” – for God had brought laughter and joy to Abraham and Sarah by fulfilling His promise.

In the same way, the Lord has brought life out of our death and given us joy and laughter through the birth of His Son. The long-awaited promise of the Savior has been fulfilled. And we are children of Abraham, for God's Word declares – "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants."

God has done for you what He did for Sarah and Mary. He has conceived new and eternal life in you by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the barrenness of your sin He has planted a living faith. In the emptiness of your soul He has caused Christ to dwell, filling you with His love and mercy. He makes your heart His manger – through faith – faith in His promise.

Nothing is too hard for the Lord – even faith in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.