

1st Advent Service – Miraculous Children of the Old Testament

Text: Genesis 21:1-7

Theme: Isaac – A Child who Brought Laughter

There are different kinds of laughter. I thought of these – There is the laughter when we don't believe something, when something is funny, when we are experiencing extreme joy or even when something that makes us uncomfortable. Of course there are also times when we can't help it when someone tickles us in just the right spot. You might also have other occasions in mind when people laugh. Isaac means "laughter." He was a child who brought both the laughter of disbelief and the laughter of joy to a woman who was 90 years old

I. God made a tremendous promise to a woman named Sarah.

He promised that she would give birth to a son when she was 65 years old. She and her husband Abraham believed God, and they went from Haran to the promised land of Canaan. It was not always easy for them to believe. Twice a king took her from her husband into his harem. Both she and Abraham were only getting older, and they still had no children. One time they even decided to help God out by conceiving a child through Sarah's maid Hagar. But God promised that the child would be born of Sarah. When Abraham was 99 and Sarah was 89, God appeared to Abraham and told him, "*I will bless [Sarah] and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.*" (Gen 17:15,16) What a promise that a woman who was 89 years old would soon bear a child!

God has also given us some wonderful promises. We all have our regrets in life. There are things that we have all done, which we are ashamed of. We wonder how God could ever accept us. Yet, we have those gracious words of our Lord, "I forgive you all of your sins." There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Many of our Christian teachings are grounded in great miracles of God. God created this universe by His Word. He is the creator and sustainer of all things. God took our flesh on Himself and was conceived in the Virgin Mary. In Holy Baptism God promises to wash away our sins and make us His children. In Holy Communion our Savior gives us His body and blood in the bread and wine, which were given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Most of all we believe that a man who had been dead for three days rose from the dead. In our personal lives we all have our troubles and trials. We have God's promise that He is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in any time of trial. We stand at the graves of our loved ones. We hear Jesus' words, "I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies, and whoever believes and believes in Me will never die." "He asks us, 'Do you believe this?'" With Martha at the grave of her brother Lazarus, with Mary when the angel Gabriel announced that she would be the mother of our Lord, with Abraham, Sarah, and Christians throughout the ages, we confess, "Yes, Lord, I believe." (Jn 11)

II. But sometimes it is so tempting to laugh in disbelief.

When God repeated His promise to Abraham that Sarah would be the mother of the child of the promise, it says, "*Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to*

*a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of 90? And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael (the son through Hagar) might live under your blessing.” God responded, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac (which means laughter). I will establish my covenant with him.” (Gen 17:16ff) God repeated His promise. This time Sarah was listening. She laughed and said to herself, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure.” (Gen 18:12) God said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, Will I really have a child, now that I am old?” **Is anything too hard for the Lord?**”*

Don't we live just that way sometimes as though there are things that are too hard for the Lord. He was willing to forgive King David after He committed adultery and murder or St. Paul after he persecuted the Church. Christ Jesus came into this world to redeem sinners, but sometimes it is so hard to believe that He would forgive me. The world mocks our beliefs today. Have you ever been the only one standing up for your faith, and you felt very alone. Suddenly you wonder whether you are right. The mountains we climb and the valleys in our lives can be overwhelming. We sometimes worry and fret as if it's all up to us. We forget the promises of God and shun the offers of His people for help and support. I will never forget the response of a woman who dearly missed her husband. I reminded her of our hope of eternal life in Christ. Her response was, “We can only hope,” but she didn't seem very sure or convinced of that hope. It is tempting to laugh in disbelief over the promises of God.

III. But in the end those who trust in the Lord laugh with great joy.

At the age of 90 Sarah had a baby, and she named him Isaac because of the laughter that he brought. Those who heard about it laughed with joy with her. It seemed impossible. She said, “*Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet, I have born him a son in his old age.*” It was just as God has promised. Nothing was impossible with God.

It is the same with us. We come before God and confess our sins and cling to the promise of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's sacrifice on the cross for us, and God fills our hearts with the peace of sin forgiven. We go through the ups and downs of this life, and it seems like the older we get the more that we realize that God has been with us every step of the way. There was nothing that was able to separate us from His love. Some of the things that the world mocks, such as God as creator, the incarnation of our Lord, Baptism or the Lord's Supper, are things that we treasure as wonderful gifts of God. Although we also grieve and mourn at the loss of loved ones, we don't do so like those who have no hope, for we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. That will be the day when all of our hopes come true. We will see the Lord Jesus in all of His glory, and He will deliver us from all the evil of this world, and bring us to the eternal joys of heaven, where our joy and laughter will find no end.

Just like Sarah, God has made great, but almost unbelievable promises to us. Don't doubt those promises, but hold fast to God's Word and every promise of the Scriptures and God will give you the kind of laughter that only those with the greatest joy can have. Just like Isaac, Jesus is a child who brings laughter, the kind that will never end.

May God grant each one of us that sure and certain faith in Christ our Savior, which bring joy that has no end. Amen.

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