

## “The Women of Advent – Sarah”

Genesis 17:15-18:31 & Genesis 21:1-7

As we continue through this Advent Season, we are looking at the roles of a few of the important women in salvation history. Last week, we witnessed the faults and failings and faith of Eve. She was flawed but faithful.

Tonight, we witness the laughter of Sarah. First, her laughter at the notion of having a child in her old age. Then her laughter of joy as Isaac is born. She is flawed, but faithful.

We first hear of Abram and Sarai living in the land of Haran – which is southeastern Iraq. They have no children. God speaks to Abram and promises that his descendants would inhabit the land of Canaan. God promised a son. God promised his descendants would become a great nation – they would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens or the sand on the seashore. And God sent Abram and Sarai to live in the land of Canaan – the land of promise.

Sarai was 65 years old at the time God spoke to Abram. You have to understand that the biological clock of these ancient people ticked a little slower than yours and mine. At age 65, Sarai was still within the normal range of childbearing.

And years go by. Abram and Sarai were living in the land of promise, but God was not keeping His promise – or so it seemed. The thing about God’s promises is that He always keeps them, and He follows through in a way that far exceeds any expectation. But He is not a God of instant gratification. We are made to wait and be patient.

Sarai, having waited long enough, comes up with a plan to give God some help and have Abram father a child through her Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. This was an accepted, legal custom in that day. But this was not what God intended to be the fulfillment of His promise. Ishmael was born 12 years after God made His promise. Ishmael was not the answer to that promise.

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and reiterated, He spoke again His covenant. And this time He changed Abram and Sarai’s names. From now on, his name would be Abraham, which means “the father of many nations.” And she would be called Sarah, which means “princess.” God promised, “kings and peoples shall come from her.” And Abraham laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man 100 years old? Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child?”

And Abraham, helping God out again said, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you” as the child of promise. God says, “No!

Sarah, your wife, will bear you a son; and you will call his name 'Isaac'" which means "he laughs." We tend to remember Sarah laughing (and we haven't even gotten to that part of the story), but Isaac's name would be a constant reminder of Abraham's laughter.

It is much like what we saw with Eve. Eve was not innocent. She too was tempted, but the lasting memory of the fall into sin is that it was the sin of Adam. Isaac being named "he laughs" is not because of anything Sarah did. All of this took place by chapter 17. Sarah doesn't laugh in disbelief until chapter 18. But it is the laughter of joy at the birth of Isaac in Genesis 21 that we really want to focus our attention upon this evening.

"God has made laughter for me," Sarah says. God kept His Word of promise. He exceeded all of their expectations. Abraham and Sarah had their doubts – even laughing at the notion that God is going to do more than they were able to accomplish with Ishmael.

We often get caught up in the idea that as long as our day to day life is doing OK, we tell God, "let that be enough." God says, "NO!" I have a greater plan for you, and I am going to greatly exceed your expectations. It may not be realized for a long time, but, in the end, my promise is sure.

There would be another child of promise who would be born,

and His coming would not be for a long time, and His name will be called “Jesus” which means, “The Lord saves.” And He will come again, although it seems like He is taking a long time. His promise is sure. It is a constant reminder spoken in His name: “The Lord saves.”

The name Isaac “he laughs” was a constant reminder to Abraham that he laughed at the notion of God providing a real child of promise. And the name Isaac was a constant reminder to Sarah of her words of joy, “God has made laughter for me.”

Like all of the women of Advent, Sarah is flawed, but faithful. She waited impatiently, and God fulfilled His promise beyond her expectation. As we are in this yearly Advent season and in the final Advent of all time, be patient and wait. As God always does for His children, He provides and fulfills His promise beyond our expectation. And He always does it in His time. Amen.