

May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God

Our reading from Genesis this morning needs a little bit of context.

We are introduced to Abram and Sari a few chapters earlier and their story and their relationship with God has begun. In Chapter 12 Abram and Sari are directed to leave their homeland, their family - leave everything and go to a land that God has promised will give them a wonderful life. God has promised that Abraham will have many descendents and that he will be a great nation - that he and his descendents will inherit the land of Canaan and that they will be a blessing to the whole world.

Heady stuff!

But we have a problem - how can Abraham be a great nation with many descendents if he does not even have one child???

We do not know much about Sarah - but we know that she is old - and Abraham is even older and we know that she has been unable to conceive a child.

Sarah is barren.

The story takes another twist because Abraham and Sarah have decided to help things along - Hagar enters the story and conceives and bears a son to Abraham.

But this is not the way that God wants the story to go. So we find ourselves in Chapter 18 and some mysterious visitors appear.

Its a hot day - its the middle of the day. Abraham is taking shelter in his tent when suddenly there are 3 visitors. He offers them hospitality - as he was required to do. But he goes above and beyond - instead of just offering some shade and water and a little bread he directs his household to prepare a feast. Sarah is to prepare a large amount of bread and the calf is to be prepared.

Did Abraham suspect that perhaps there was more to the visitors than one might first think? Is that the reason for the generous hospitality?

Perhaps...Abraham has encountered God before.

Today's story is funny - it is high comedy - and it is especially good for people who do not think there is any humour in the Bible!

The visitors ask Abraham where is your wife Sarah? After all she is absent - she prepared the bread helped get the meal ready - but she is not helping to entertain. But she is listening!

The visitors tell Abraham that Sarah is going to have a baby.

And Sarah laughs from behind the tent door.

And Sarah laughs.

And why not? She is well past child bearing years - she is old and her husband is even older. Why not laugh at this absurd suggestion?

But when asked Sarah denies laughing....God says...probably with a twinkle and a chuckle - yes you did!! This is the first and the last time in the story of Abraham that God speaks directly to Sarah.

I did not laugh - yes you did!

The whole point of the story is that nothing is impossible for God.

What is the miracle here? Is it that 2 old people were able to have a baby? Perhaps. But the miracle might be something even more significant.

Sarah and Abraham had struggled in their marriage - they had grown distant and apart. Abraham had denied she was his wife - claiming she was his sister. And he would do so again - even after the promise of a son. He fathered a child with another woman. Sarah's musings might hint at a resignation of the distance between them or perhaps even a lessening of expectations.

The miracle is that the promise that they would have a son brings them back together again. Isaac's birth and conception were not miraculous. The reconciliation of his parents was.

Sarah's pregnancy is one of several in the Bible in which God intervened in nature to bring about a child.

And in time the visitor was correct - Sarah would conceive a child, give birth to a child and his name was Isaac- which means "he laughed".

Isaac was the fulfilment of a promise from God.

And with his birth - Sarah laughed again - not at the impossibility or the absurdity - this time she laughs in joy and says that now everyone will join in her laughter.

How appropriate that the fulfillment of God's promise should be named - he laughed.

God's question is the central point of the story - is anything too wonderful for the Lord?

And Sarah's answer - our answer is no. There is nothing too wonderful for the Lord. In God all things are possible.

AMEN