

In the Bible, there are two women who receive a message from God. One of them is rather old, and one of them is quite young. Both of them have no children. The one because she can't have children, and the other because she's still a virgin. But the Lord tells both of them that they are going to have a son. The one is Sarah, the mother of Isaac, the wife of Abraham, and the other is Mary, the mother of our Lord. Both of these women together show us that nothing is impossible with God. Both of these women show us that nothing will stop God from doing what he says he's going to do. And through both of these women, God teaches us what it means to trust in him above all things, even when it seems impossible for us to do so.

Because we meet Sarah, the wife of Abraham, all the way back in the book of Genesis. And in Genesis chapter 18, three men come to visit Abraham and Sarah. Only these three men are not ordinary men. They are the Lord and two of his angels. And the Lord tells Abraham that Sarah is going to have a son in the following year, which, of course, was a very great promise to Abraham, because Abraham was not a young man. But perhaps more difficult, Sarah was not young either. Sarah was 90 years old when this promise came to her. Imagine telling a 90-year-old woman she's going to be pregnant again! That's just not something that happens. We just don't expect it to. Humanly speaking, there is no possible way that Sarah is ever going to have a child. And worse than this, she's been long barren. If she didn't have a child when she was a young woman, what is going to change now so that she can have her first son? She was menopausal. She was barren. And she was old. How could Sarah ever have a child?

That's what Sarah thought too, because she laughed when she heard this, though she wasn't laughing out of joy or happiness. Genesis chapter 18, verse 12, tells us: "Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?'" Because Sarah was wondering, how could she ever become a mother? After all of those years without children, what was suddenly going to change that she would have her first son? It seemed impossible, the kind of thing that nobody could do, not even God. No, she was not going to have a son, she thought, and so she laughed. It seemed simply ridiculous to ever think that it would happen.

But the Lord did not leave her in her doubt. In verse 14 we hear: "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah's age was not going to stop God. Sarah's barrenness was not going to stop God. God would give Abraham a son. Even though it seemed impossible, even though it seemed like it would never happen, God was going to give him that son just as he promised to do. The 90-year-old Sarah would nurse her first child. And that's exactly what happened. In the following year, she gave birth to Isaac. Because even though it seemed impossible, God did exactly what he said he was going to do, because nothing is too hard for the Lord.

And now, two thousand years after Sarah, we meet Mary. And the angel Gabriel goes to visit Mary, telling her that she also is going to have a son in the following year. And this was also a very great promise, because this son that was going to be born was no ordinary man. Gabriel says, verses 32 and 33: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." This child would be the long-promised Christ, the Son of God and the Son of David.

But Mary also wonders when she hears this, wondering how it's going to happen, though not for the same reason as Sarah. Because where Sarah laughed in her disbelief, Mary asks a sincere question. Verse 34: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary had never known a man, yet she was going to give birth to a son. How was that supposed to happen? How could she become a mother in a way that no one ever had or ever will in all the history of mankind? From the beginning of creation, a child has always been born in one way: with a father and with a mother. So how could it possibly be, she wonders, that a virgin would give birth to a son? How could a child not have a father? It seemed impossible, the kind of thing that no one could do. But Mary wonders: how was God going to do it?

Gabriel answers her: through the power of God. Verse 35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." In other words, God would do this, because nothing is too hard for God. If he could give Sarah in her nineties a son, he can also give a son to a virgin. Just like Elizabeth, Mary's relative who was also an old woman, but pregnant, six months pregnant, with John the Baptist. If God could do those things, God could also do this, because nothing will be impossible with God.

And Mary believed what God said. As impossible as it seemed to her, even though she had no idea how it was going to happen, she believed and submitted herself in true faith to the Lord. Verse 38, she says: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word!" That's exactly what happened. God kept his word, and Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. She who had never known a man gave birth to her firstborn son, because nothing is too hard for the Lord.

And on this day, God still speaks to us through his Word, often promising us great things, things that we may wonder how he's going to be able to keep them. How do we respond to what God says? Do we respond with the laughter of Sarah or with the faith of Mary? Because there are times when God's promises do seem impossible. Maybe we're struggling with something as great as life in the midst of death, or maybe something as mundane as wondering how we're going to make it to next week. Or even just wondering how God could ever forgive me my sins. How would God be able to do this? It's easy to laugh like Sarah, thinking that we know better, that we are somehow wiser than God, that we've got it all figured out on our own, that we don't need what God says. Our sin makes us think that we know what's possible and what isn't possible. Our sin makes us think that we know what's going to happen or what won't happen. Our sin makes us think that we know what God is going to do, or rather, what God cannot do. Our sin makes us think that we are greater than God.

And yet God will do what he says. Nothing will be too hard for him. Nothing will be impossible with him. And we see that clearly in the birth of Jesus Christ, his Son. Because Jesus was born to show us that God can do all things. Jesus was born to show us that nothing is impossible with the Lord. Jesus was born just as the Father said that he would be born. And because of that, we know that God will keep all of his other promises too. We know that God will give us life in the midst of death. We know that God will carry us through all of life's troubles, through all of life's struggles. We know that God will forgive us our sins and make us heirs of heaven. We know all of this because God has already done the impossible by giving us Jesus Christ, his Son, born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem.

So let us hold on to God's promises in true faith, knowing that God can and God will do what he says. Even when it seems impossible to us, even when we can't figure out how he's going to do it, God will do it, because God has promised to these things through Jesus. So may we on this Christmas Eve, and in every day to come, say with Mary: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word!"

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, just as you have promised us through the words of the prophets. Help us always to submit ourselves to all of your promises in true faith, even when they seem hard or impossible to us, because you can do all things and you have done all things well through Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.