

✧ Jesu juva ✧

## A PARENT'S LAUGHTER, A CHILD'S BIRTH

Psalm 2, Genesis 18:1-15

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen



As we spend the next few weeks in the joyful anticipation of the celebration of Christmas, it is important to note that the birth of Christ on that most holy day was not the first time that He had come down out of heaven to interact with men. Several times in the Old Testament, the Lord Christ, the Son of God, did just that. We call such appearances of God among His people "theophanies". A theophany is an event in which God is revealed, or rather in which God reveals Himself.

Today we heard the account of Abraham receiving the three visitors at his tent.

And we are given to know right from the beginning of the story that one of these visitors is the Lord Himself, the Son of God appearing as a man, long before He actually takes on human flesh. "Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day."

And Abraham receives this visitation with great joy! He runs from the door of his tent, bows down to the ground, offers his hospitality and brings them an excellent meal of good bread, veal, and milk and butter, probably the finest food he could provide. To the faithful, the Lord's presence is always a source of joy and holy awe, and cause for celebration.



Not so, of course, for the unbelieving, as we learn just a few verses later in Genesis when the angels of the Lord go down to Sodom and Gomorrah. There they are greeted not with joy or hospitality, but with unbelief and depraved perversity. And to those cities the Lord brought His justice and wrath, destroying them entirely by fire and everyone in them (with the exception of Lot's family, of course). But to Abraham and Sarah the Lord's coming did not mean wrath and destruction, but blessing.

And indeed the Lord did come with blessing; for He comes to announce to Abraham and his wife a keeping of a long-standing promise, a fulfillment of part of the promise of the covenant, that Abraham would have many heirs and that from his and Sarah's flesh would come a child who would also receive the covenant

promise and would become an ancestor of the Messiah. "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son."

Now when Sarah hears this, she laughs silently within herself, thinking how could this thing possibly come to pass? She had been barren her whole life, and now was well past child-bearing years. And now her husband too was growing ancient. And so the Lord confronts her unbelief, asking why she laughed and said these things in her heart?

Luther says of this: "The Holy Spirit brings up these matters in order to strengthen the faith of this saintly and chaste matron; for inasmuch as she is hampered by the thoughts of her flesh, she does not yet believe, nor is she able to hope that she will have a son from her aged husband. She is satisfied to be the mother of an adopted son, but she is altogether dead so far as the hope of conceiving and bearing a child is concerned. Therefore it is necessary for Sarah to hear a word by which she, as though brought back to life, may rise again to the hope of fruitfulness; for the word is truly a voice that raises from death. But it is death for Sarah to think that she is a corpse. This thought is corrected by the word, and the corpse, as though recalled from death, begins to live again. Thus all this takes place for the purpose of arousing faith."

And this revelation of the Lord's knowledge of her inner thoughts, along with His rebuke at her denial of them serves to strengthen her faith. His words become a blessing to her so that the writer to the Hebrews can later say: "By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11). And so the mother's laugh of astonished unbelief is at the birth of Isaac turned into the sound of joy and faith, the name Isaac meaning "laughter".

And this is all important, of course, because from this line, the promised Seed would come. Of this family the Christ, the Son of God would come. And note how He comes, born of a woman even less likely to have a child than aged Sarah, born of a young virgin without the help or participation of a man. And yet this Virgin believed the Word given her by God and by that Word conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And who is this one for whose coming the whole world had waited? According to the Second Psalm, which we chanted a few minutes ago, this One is the Anointed, the promised Messiah, of whom the Father said: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession..." Against this one were gathered many powers: rulers of the earth like Herod the Great and Pontius Pilate; all the forces of Satan, the demons and false gods of this world; the sins of mankind; and even the power of death. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.'"

But at this birth of this coming of this Holy Child, it is not the mother, but the Father who laughs, God the Father that is. "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision..." for this Child brings to fulfillment all that was promised to the patriarchs of old, promises going all the way back to the Garden. This Child shall overcome sin and conquer death. And by Him Satan has been laid low in defeat. And before Him all kings and rulers will bow the knee, one way or another. And so will all people. For some it will be bowing in terror and dread; but for us, the faithful, this theophany will be greeted with joy and holy awe and celebration. For Christ has come and rescued us from our enemies. And now we, in faith, kiss, as it were the Son. And like Abraham we receive blessing at His presence, the eternal blessings of sins forgiven and life restored. Indeed "Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him". Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠