

# Further up, Further in

## Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
Presbyterian Church

### “MIRACULOUS BIRTHS: ISAAC”

For individual study or group discussion

In Peter Jackson’s film portrayal of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo encounters Gandalf on the road to Hobbiton. The cheeky hobbit chides, “You’re late, Gandalf!” to which the old grey wizard retorts, “A wizard is never late, nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to.” As we begin our Advent series on *Miraculous Births*, the same could be said of Isaac’s birth. It seems to be very late. Abraham is one hundred years old and Sarah is ninety-one! But God’s promises are perfectly timed, and Isaac’s birth arrives precisely when he intends it to.

#### **A Promise Fulfilled: God always keeps His Word. (vv. 1-2)**

Note the repetition in verses 1-2: “The LORD visited Sarah *as he had said*, and the LORD did to Sarah *as he had promised*. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age *at the time which God had spoken to him*.” Moses leaves no reason to doubt who is in control. God always keeps his Word. God always fulfills his promises. Dutch Reformed theologian S.G. De Graaf describes God’s promise to Abraham and compares it with his promise of a Savior to come: “*This child was born after Abraham and Sarah had reached the age when people are normally incapable of having children. Thus the child was born by a divine miracle. By his very birth, then, Isaac pointed ahead to Jesus Christ, who was also to be born in a miraculous way. His [Isaac’s] birth was so unlikely that those who heard about it could not help but laugh. For believers, however, the laughter was an indication of amazement and ecstasy, just as we laugh in faith at the birth of the Christ.*”<sup>1</sup>

- During Advent, we remember and rejoice that God fulfilled his promise to send a Savior (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14). Discuss the many ways in which Isaac’s birth is a foreshadowing of the birth of Jesus Christ. (Compare Genesis 18:13 with Luke 1:34; Genesis 18:14 with Luke 1:37; Genesis 17:19 with Matthew 1:21; and Genesis 21:2 with Galatians 4:4.)

#### **A Faithful Response: His people are to respond in wonder and obedience. (vv. 3-7)**

The next few verses describe how laughter is the reward for those who put their trust in God. Hebrews 11:11 states that “by faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.” Earlier in Genesis, Sarah’s laughter was incredulous (18:12), but now her laughter is full of wonder (v. 6). According to R. Kent Hughes, “*Thus here in Genesis we get a sampling of what has been the experience of God’s people in all ages: God is true to his word. God would have the last laugh, so to speak. And now new mother Sarah gave joyous utterance that had the form of a song (vv. 6-7). There was laughter everywhere. Grace rained down on Abraham and his people. God had kept his word. They had obeyed, and their hearts sang.*”<sup>2</sup>

- Read Psalm 126 and compare it to Abraham and Sarah’s experience. How are they similar? Have you ever wondered at God’s grace? Share your experience.
- The Hebrew word for “rejoice” can mean the same as “laughter”<sup>3</sup> From our previous studies in Luke 15, what causes Jesus to rejoice?
- In Luke 6:21, Jesus also promises laughter for those who weep. Read Isaiah 25:8 and Revelation 7:17. What will cause God’s people to laugh in wonder?
- The Westminster Confession of Faith shorter catechism Q&A 1 states man’s chief end “is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” How is rejoicing related to enjoyment? What are ways you can make enjoying God a reality in your life.

DATE: December 03, 2023

SPEAKER: Wil/Aaron

SERIES: Advent 2023

PASSAGE: Genesis 21:1-7

## Family Dinner Table

### *Laughter*

Frederick Buechner, whose works have been compared to C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton, was an American author, Presbyterian minister, preacher, and theologian. In his book, *Telling the Truth*, he retells the story of Abraham and Sarah and imagines the moment they both break out in laughter: “*The place to start is with a woman laughing. She is an old woman, and after a lifetime in the desert, her face is cracked and rutted like a six-month drought. She hunches her shoulders around her eyes and starts to shake. She squinnies her eyes shut, and her laughter is all wheeze and tears running down as she rocks back and forth in her kitchen chair. She is laughing because she is pushing 91 hard and has just been told she is going to have a baby. The old woman’s name is Sarah, of course, and her old man’s name is Abraham, and they are laughing at the idea of a baby’s being born in the geriatric ward and Medicare’s picking up the tab. Maybe the most interesting part of it all is that far from getting angry at them for laughing, God told them that when the baby was born he wanted them to name him Isaac, which in Hebrew means laughter. So you can say that God not only tolerated their laughter, but blessed it and in a sense joined in it himself.*”<sup>4</sup>

- Discuss the wonder of Isaac’s birth. Then read Luke 2:1-20 and discuss the wonder of Christ’s birth.

### PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Hope Unlimited, supported partner ministry

### PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Ugandan Seminary Faculty, supported national partners

<sup>1</sup> De Graaf, S. G. *Promise and Deliverance Volume 1: From Creation to the Conquest of Canaan*. 1977. Ontario, Canada. Paideia Press. 131

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, R. Kent. *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing*. 2004. Wheaton, IL. Crossway Books. 293-94

<sup>3</sup> Sacha; *To Laugh*. Strong’s Hebrew: 7832. פִּי (sacha) – to laugh. (n.d.). <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7832.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Buechner, Frederick. *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Comedy, Tragedy, and Fairy Tale*. 1977. NY NY. Harper & Row.