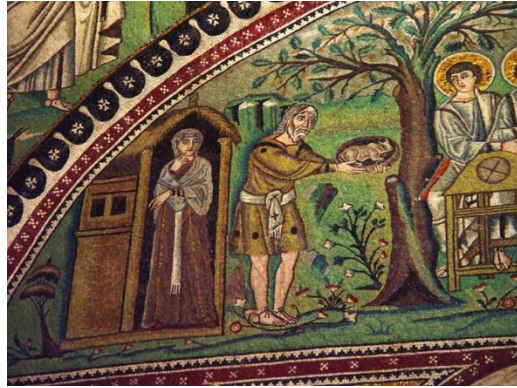


By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is a retired pastor and serves on the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions.

Laughter in the House (Genesis 17:15-22)

Imagine being Sarah, unable to have children, some people may even have thought she was cursed since one of a woman's major roles in her society was providing an heir for her husband. But then you hear the news, at 90 years old, that you are going to be a mother! Imagine the flood of emotions that must have washed over her at that very moment: joy, fear, wonder? She laughs at the very thought, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" (Gen. 18:12)



But Abraham falls right down laughing when he first hears from God that it is Sarai - now Sarah - who shall bear his child! He has been so focused on Ishmael as the heir, his first-born child through Sarai's slave Hagar, that he has all but given up on having a child by Sarah. But God says no, Ishmael will have many descendants, but it is Sarah's child who will receive the blessing; Sarah will bear the child of the promise.

In this story God speaks very directly to Abraham. Sarai (which means 'princess') is to now be called Sarah (princess of the multitude). God tells Abraham, I will bless her and...I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations, kings of peoples shall come from her. It is Sarah's child that will be the heir, carry on the legacy, and it is through Isaac, whose name means 'he laughs', that an everlasting covenant shall be established.

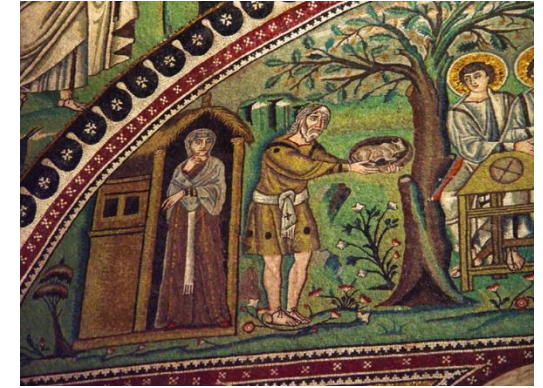
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exchanged, and the story of a people who have been persecuted and oppressed over the centuries still remain on the earth to share their legacy.

I once was able to attend one of these services, where the Rabbi shared the story of Hanukkah. After the Maccabees reclaimed the Temple and cleared it of the idols placed there by the Syrians, they found only a small amount of pure olive oil bearing the seal of the high priest. It was enough to last for only one day, but by a miracle of God, it continued to burn for eight days, until new oil was available.

Hanukkah is a joyous celebration of thanksgiving, survival, and deliverance by the God who established his everlasting covenant with his people and keeps his promises! Every year those who are faithful celebrate this victory with the lighting of candles and giving gifts.

At the service the Rabbi also said, “The miracle is not that the oil lasted for eight nights when it should have lasted only one, the miracle is that we are still here to celebrate - so let’s eat and celebrate and rejoice in God’s blessing, his everlasting covenant to his people!”

Today, Christians look forward to the celebration of the birth of the Christ child, and there continues to be laughter in the house of Abraham and Sarah. The birth of the Christ child is cause for rejoicing and laughter. He is to be a light to the nations and a new hope for all peoples. Christians believe it is part of the everlasting promise of God to Abraham that he will be the father of many nations (Genesis 12:1-3).

Let there be laughter in the house as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child, continuing the legacy of praising God and being blessed by holy offspring!

Amen.

Image: St. Vitale - Abraham and the Three Angels (Detail), from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=32154>. Original source: Image donated by Patout Burns.

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