

Dear Friends,

Some years ago I remember running up to Sun City West, to Del Web Hospital. A young mother of our congregation had just given birth to a baby. It was in the Louisa Kellum Center for Women's Health, the new wing of the hospital. I joked that this was the first time I had visited a newborn and mother in Sun City West. The joke of course being that it is a retirement community where a person would not expect a baby to be born.

Out of curiosity I looked some records on the Internet. Who is the oldest woman to give birth naturally? On Wikipedia they listed a woman from Great Britain, the wife of a shoemaker, who naturally conceived and gave birth to a child at age 58. It is hard to believe, but it happened.

We have another record of a birth in Genesis 15. Sarah gave birth to Isaac when she was 90 years old and her husband, Abraham, was 100 years old. (Gen 17:17) Some people would say, *"I can't believe that. That's impossible."* It was hard for the Abraham and Sarah to believe it. It is another lesson in Scripture where God does this impossible.

We have just held our Easter Sunday celebration. Jesus is not dead. He has risen! Many people would scoff at that and say, *"It is impossible."* In fact Thomas, Jesus' own apostle, said as much.

Martin Luther wrote 500 years ago, *"This article of (the resurrection) has suffered and still suffers the most opposition and is most difficult to believe."* (What Luther Says, 3 vols., Ed. Ewald M. Plass. St. Louis: CPH, 1959, 3:1215-1218)

Believing is important because we confess a bodily resurrection not only of Jesus Christ, but for ourselves through him. (Apostle's Creed) This is really what Easter faith is all about: **Easter Faith Believes the Impossible.** Abram's story in Genesis 15 will help us to understand Easter faith.

1. It believes when God says, "Don't be afraid."

As we meet Abram in Genesis 15 it is useful to ask the question, *"Was Abram afraid of anything?"* He had just pursued kings of four nations. They were powerful and had just defeated a group of five other kings. It had not been difficult for them. (14:10) However, Abram pursued them with 300 armed men and defeated the four kings. A person might guess from this that Abram had no fear. This is not true.

In Genesis 15 we find that Abram is very afraid. The Lord God had promised him as son. A descendant of his son's line would someday be the Savior of the world. Abram at this time is over 85 years of age. He is afraid that he will not have a son and other descendants. The Lord God comes to Abram in a vision and speaks to him and says, **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”** Easter faith is not afraid.

A. Lord God is near to the believer and is ready to help. The Lord reminds and reassures Abram, **“I am your shield, your very great reward.”** (1)

1. Abram knew what the Lord could do. He had chased after the four kings with 300 men and yet the Lord had protected him and given him the victory. Abram had even turned down the plunder or treasures from the victory. He did because the Lord God was his reward. The Lord had already made him a wealthy man. Abram had experienced the good things the Lord could do for him. The words **“I am”** are in the present tense. The Lord would continue to be Abram's shield and reward.

2. Many years later the Lord would say to Joshua, Moses' aid, **“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”** (Joshua 1:9) Jesus also told his followers, **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** (Matthew 20:28) Easter faith is not afraid.

B. When we hear this we might wonder, *“How could Abram be afraid at all? He should have simply trusted in the Lord to provide him a son.”* Why are you and I often afraid? We are afraid going bankrupt and not paying the bills. We are afraid of surgery and ending up crippled. And above all, we are afraid of dying.

I think this is easy to understand, when you think of a child standing at the edge of the swimming pool. Mom or dad is down in the water and commands, *“Jump and I will catch you.”* Yet, the child hesitates. The child is full of fear. Why? Because there is something about going into a situation where we have no control. A non-swimmer in deep water, a series of bills for which we momentarily have no funds, a surgery, a cemetery, these are all the same in that we don't have control and it is unsettling at best and it is terrifying at worst.

It all has to do with a three-letter word called “sin.” Sin is when humanity let go of God's hand and decide to walk its own path. Sin causes us to not trust God and to have guilty conscience. Another thing it does is it causes

fear. Sin causes us to focus on ourselves and our problems and we don't see any immediate solutions and so we are filled with fear and terror.

One of the reasons God delayed in giving Abram a son was to teach him to trust. God is constantly working for us to trust him as the solution to sin and to all of our problems. When we see God as our Savior, the one who can help us in all circumstance of life, then our fear goes away. Easter faith is not afraid, but trusts God.

2. It believes God's word of promise.

Faith has to have something to trust in. We see with Abram that he believed God's word of promise. In fact as the Lord continues to speak to him it grew stronger. Our Easter faith is real and it grows stronger through God's word of promise.

A. **“Then the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.’”**

Abram waited another 15 years and there must have been some days when he wondered. But when he was 100 years old, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. The Lord promised that his descendants would be numerous. Before Abram died he got to see his twin grand-sons. He had other children with another wife after Sarah died. Today Abram has many physical and spiritual descendants all over the world. The Lord kept his word of promise.

B. The Lord had promised one descendant that was more important than all the others. He had promised the Savior of the world.

1. From a human point of view, this was a more difficult promise to keep. Later on the Lord revealed that the Savior would be born miraculously of a virgin. It was also prophesied in the Old Testament that the Savior would rise from the dead. It would seem that having an elderly couple conceive and give birth would be easier. The truth is that all of these miracles are only something God can accomplish by his almighty power.

2. He did do these things in order to bring us the forgiveness of sins and salvation. God caused Abraham and Sarah to have baby Isaac long after they were capable of having children. He caused the Virgin Mary to conceive the Son of God in her womb. Jesus paid for the sins of all people by dying on the cross. The Lord God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day.

C. We are to believe God's word when he says, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** It may be tempting to look at the minister and doubt. It may be tempting to

look at the multitude of our sins and doubt. It may be tempting to look at the graves in cemetery and wonder if God really forgives.

Remember that Abram listened to God's word of promise and believed. We need to continue listening to God's word of promise. He tells us Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, was born of the Virgin Mary and that he suffered and died for our sins and rose on the third day. That very word works faith, Easter faith.

3. It is faith that says, "Amen."

At the end of our prayers we often add the word, "*amen.*" The word means "**make it so Lord.**" Easter faith says, "*amen.*" We are certain that God will bless us through our Easter faith.

A. We are told "**Abram believed.**" He had faith in Jesus.

1. This faith shown itself in his living for the Lord. Many times in the Bible we see him living as a holy person. When he was commanded to offer his only son as a burnt offering. He obeyed the voice of the Lord. Isaac was spared, but faith led Abram to do everything the Lord asked.

2. There were moments when Abram sinned. He lied about his wife being his sister to the King of Egypt. We can be sure that he looked to the Lord for forgiveness in the Savior. He lived believing in the forgiveness of sins.

B. There were blessings that came as a result, "**The Lord credited [his faith] as righteousness.**"

1. God considered him a righteous person. He was not guilty that is innocent before the Lord God. He was counted as one of God's people. All those who believe as Abraham are viewed the same way by God. Through faith in Jesus we are saved.

2. At this point some people would credit Abram with earning righteousness.

After all, he believed. St. Paul assures us by nature we are "**Dead in our sins.**" (Ephesians 2:1) He also tells us, "**No can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.**" (1 Corinthians 12:3) The Holy Spirit gives us faith as a gift. St. Paul says so in Ephesians 2:8-9.

Conclusion: Remember **Easter Faith Believes the Impossible.** Abram believed that God could do the impossible and his faith was blessed. Today by God's grace we believe, and we are blessed! Amen.

Genesis 15:1-6

1 After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield,
your very great reward.”

2 But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3

And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

4 Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” 5 He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.