

WAITING FOR DAWN: Barren, Yet Fruitful

Isaiah 7:10-16 & Luke 1:26-38

Rev. James Ramsey, December 22, 2013

The world says barrenness prevents fruitfulness. What are your prospects when you are barren?



We imagine that we are held back by any manner of handicap, shortcoming or fateful infirmity. We buckle under the excruciating understanding that a grace-filled, loving, productive life is well nigh impossible.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived in our world. She imagined she was held back by her low status, by her youthful inexperience, by her virginity. She buckled under the painful realization that she lived in an occupied land with no hope of salvation.

Yet Mary came to realize she stood in a long line of barren, but fruitful women. And we stand in that same line!

Mary realizes this when the Angel Gabriel announces that not only will she conceive in her womb and bear a son, but her older relative Elizabeth “in her old age” has also conceived a son. In fact she learns Elizabeth has just passed her second trimester – even though everyone called her barren.

“Nothing will be impossible with God,” Gabriel exclaims.

Surely Mary knew the great stories of her faith, for barren women show up again and again in the history of salvation. The sons that are born out of the anguish of their barrenness are blessed by God and become pivotal figures in God’s plan.



We remember most especially the great matriarch of our faith: Sarah, husband of Abraham.

SARAH is introduced in the Book of Genesis with the words: *Sarai was barren, she had no child.* (Genesis 11:30)

In the ancient world, it was an awful thing for a woman to be unable to bear children. Barrenness, at the very least, was regarded as a great misfortune, but more probably as a curse.

For Sarah, barrenness was a terrible grief, a great sorrow, one she carried into her old age. Yet, the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous... You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations... I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and "As for Sarai your wife... I will bless her, and moreover 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."

So after decade upon decade of fruitless longing and waiting, until all hope of conceiving a child had withered away, Sarah bore a son to Abraham in their old age through the miraculous intervention of God.

And as the LORD had commanded her, Sarah called her son Isaac, which means "laughter" because she was filled with laughter at the Providence of God.

"Nothing will be impossible with God."

And there were other notable barren women --take the wife of Manoah, we read in Judges 13:2-3.

²There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren, having borne no children. ³And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman



and said to her, "Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son..."

The son was no ordinary boy. He was named Samson, the last of the judges of Israel, a hero known for his great strength.

Or take one, Hannah. We read in 1 Samuel that Hannah was the wife of Elkanah, the priest. Unable to bear children, Hannah suffered great ridicule, especially from Peninnah, a woman in her house. Hannah was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. Hannah vowed in her prayer that if she were to give birth to a son, she would devote him to the LORD's service. Her prayer was finally answered. She conceived and bore a son and named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD." Hannah's son grew up to be the great Prophet Samuel, who would anoint King David, shepherd of Israel.



"Nothing will be impossible with God."

Mary, medically incapable of having a child because she was a virgin, was barren – and so she stands in a long line of women in the Bible who were unable for one reason or another, old age, some physical limitation, young age, a curse, whatever – to have children. But also

women who overcame their barrenness by the power and providence of God. They were barren, yet fruitful. But not just women.

The great Moses was barren, in a way. He seemed to be a stutterer, he was NOT a public speaker, yet God called him to lead Israel, to be God's mouthpiece, to speak face to face with Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Moses might have been barren in this way, but he was clearly fruitful.

So, we could say, in Moses' case, a stutterer, but fruitful.

When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, Jeremiah knew it was impossible. Jeremiah was too young. Jeremiah, like Moses before him, did not know how to speak. Yet God said,

⁵“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Where God is concerned, being a poor public speaker, even a stutterer, is no barrier to fruitfulness. Old age is no barrier to fruitfulness, nor is young age. Barrenness is no barrier to fruitfulness.

“Nothing will be impossible with God.”

The very circumstances of Jesus’ birth remind us of this. And certainly the details of his life bear this out. Through his healing word and healing touch the blind realize they can see, the deaf realize they can hear, the lame realize they can walk, the demon-possessed realize they can be free. And we realize that by God’s power – we can be fruitful, no matter what burden we bear, what stigma we carry, what handicap we perceive.



Mary stood in a great line of women who were barren, yet fruitful. We’re all barren in one way or another. And we can all be fruitful, faithful and productive for God’s purposes. What seems impossible to us, is possible with God,



For, as the angel said to Mary,

“Nothing will be impossible with God.”

So you can be mentally challenged, but fruitful. Physically handicapped, but fruitful. Underemployed, but fruitful. Overweight, but fruitful. Poor, but fruitful. Grieving, but fruitful.

The world says barrenness prevents fruitfulness. The world assumes that Savannah Day, of Troutsville, Virginia, is an unfortunate sad case. You see,

Savannah has been diagnosed with a rare condition called Chiari malformation. She needs to undergo brain surgery. We would assume that Savannah's Christmas would surely be ruined when she found out that she would have to be in Ohio for the holidays. Instead of celebrating at home with family and friends, she will have to spend Christmas with strangers at Cincinnati Children's Hospital while she prepares for surgery.



Savannah, a cheerleader, decided that she was not going to have her Christmas ruined. She wanted to make a difference for other sick children. So, she and her two sisters, 6 year-old Chloe and 17 year-old Sierra, decided they would collect toys for the other patients at the hospital.

The girls' mom, Michelle Day, said, "They looked at me and said, 'We're not going to have a Christmas so we want to take Christmas to everyone that's not going to have a Christmas like us.'" Michelle learned there would be 500 patients at the hospital over Christmas. So, their goal was to find 500 toys.

"I told the girls, and they never flinched and said, 'We'll just ask more people, Mom.'"

The sisters put their fund-raising experience from cheerleading to amazing work. They created a Facebook campaign called "Cheer 4 Savannah" and spread the word through their squads. Soon the cheerleaders of opposing teams, local companies and even Little League teams were donating to the cause.

"Toys have just been coming to the house," Michelle said. "My husband's employer agreed to house them so we've just been sorting, labeling and boxing them."



By the time the girls were ready to leave for Ohio earlier this month, they had collected over 4,000 toys!

Savannah and her sisters presented the toys to hospital officials earlier this month. The toys are being distributed to current patients and future patients as Christmas draws closer. With the leftover toys, the hospital plans to re-stock its playrooms.



It seems impossible that a sick little girl could have such a huge heart.

But **“Nothing will be impossible with God.”**

Savannah might be sick, which is a kind of barrenness, but she is fruitful.

Christian Bucks is kind of a goofy, regular kid. His barrenness might be that he is just a young, basic, unspectacular kid. What could he do for his school or his world?

He’s only in second grade, but Christian noticed that some of his friends didn’t have anyone to play with on the playground at Roundtown Elementary School. They would be lonely at recess and he wanted to stop that. He decided to help his classmates create new friendships, and avoid loneliness, by creating a special “buddy bench.”



The way the bench works is simple. If a student feels lonely or sad and needs a friend to talk to, they can go sit at the buddy bench. Then, the other children will know that they are looking for a buddy and someone will come sit down and talk to them.

If two people are sitting at the bench, they could ask each other if they want to play, Christian said.

Christian thinks the buddy bench will also help people cultivate larger friend groups. He brought the idea to Principal Matthew Miller at the end of the last school year.

"Mr. Miller checked around and found a bench that would work for our school. Before he ordered the bench, he showed me the colors and I got to pick the style and color of the bench.



I was the first person that got to sit on the bench when it arrived at Roundtown," Christian said.

Principal Miller described Christian as a Roundtown P.R.O.U.D. (Polite-Responsible-Outstanding-Understanding-Dependable) student. He and the rest of the staff hope the children begin to use the buddy bench.

Most of us assume there is nothing that can be done to overcome loneliness, awkwardness, a feeling of being left out. That's impossible to change.

Not for a Christian! **"Nothing will be impossible with God."**



Let us stand in the line, with Savannah and Christian, the long line, with Mary, and all those who have come before her. Most importantly this Christmas, let us stand with Mary's son, Jesus. Let us be fruitful, even in barrenness!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.