

God of all grace, who did in the fullness of time send Jesus Christ, Your Son to be born of a woman, that He might redeem the sons of men and make them the sons of God: Accept our endless praise for this Your mercy; and grant that the Spirit of Your Son may so dwell in our hearts that we may evermore serve and worship You with the freedom of Your children; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colqhoun, p. 37)

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 of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.** And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And **Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me."** And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

In Christ Jesus, whose day Abraham saw and responded with joyous laughter, dear fellow redeemed:

Truly this is a joyous season of the year for us as Christians, our hymns and carols certainly reflect this - whether we sing "*Joy to the World*", "*Rejoice, Rejoice, this Happy Morn*", "*Now Sing, We Now Rejoice*". Most days of birth are met with joy, smiles and even laughter as the newborn is welcomed to our world. But this One birth has greater joy than any other ever recorded and annually marked with happy recollections.

Our text is what Jesus would later refer to when His Jerusalem enemies objected to His claims of being the Christ, God come in the flesh. Jesus said to them: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself."

As it was in the days of Abraham and Sarah, so it was in the days of Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna and so it is with us today. All believers down through the millennia, **Rejoicing to See the Day of Christ Is the Blessed Response.**

I

Abraham and Sarah waited until their tenth decade to see the Day of Christ fulfilled through them, but those last 25 years were especially filled with tense anticipation. Before that they may have

heard that such a birth was promised, but at ages 75 and 65 respectively they were told specifically the Christ would come through a conception that would happen through their union. Two decades and half would pass for that day finally to arrive.

In frustration at one point Sarah gave her handmaiden Hagar to Abraham. She bore Ishmael, but he was not the son of promise. God would accomplish the miraculous through this aged couple. Isaac would be born. Isaac means laughter. The announcement of his birth was met with the unbelievable joyous response from both Sarah and Abraham alike – they laughed. The promise of the Christ did not die as it appeared it had in their aged and decrepit bodies, but from Abraham’s loins and Sarah’s womb the son of promise was born.

Sarah said: "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." Admit it, you seniors, would it not make you laugh to hear that you were now expecting a child? Grandchildren, would you not laugh to hear grandma and grandpa are having another child? Of course! But what is impossible for us to accomplish, with God it is possible and with Him it most certainly happened.

It happened for us all even to this day. The seed of Christ did not die with Abraham and Sarah, but the Seed continued to move through one generation to another until the Holy Spirit came to that seed of the woman in Mary, the virgin undefiled. Our Savior arrived and has brought joy and laughter to millions of lost sinners like you and me. For as the shepherds heard: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Christ, the Lord." They made haste with joy to find what God had done for them and for all sinners.

II

But we know, even for many of us very personally, this season can also be known as a season of sadness, as we perhaps miss those who often brought joy to our lives but are no longer among us. Or our lives are filled with frustrations with our relationships in our families or at work or in school. Or we have been struck with the real possibility of the end of our lives and review them recounting numerous disappointments and failures. Furthermore, the perceived joyous uplifted hearts all around us can cause us to take an even deeper dive into that dark despair of depression.

Consider Mary. We usually think of her as having a contented heart of pious mirth. But consider what challenges to such a state faced her. When she told Joseph that she was expecting her firstborn, he did not receive that news well. Even though they got to leave the

wagging tongues of Nazareth behind, she had an arduous journey to Bethlehem near her due date. Then giving birth in a stable, having to lay her newborn in a manger was surely not how she intended to give care to her Firstborn, who, for nine months, had grown strong within her. When they go to the temple, Simeon then foretells that the birth of her Son would bring the rising and falling of many in Israel. Her Son would be spoken against by many and a sword would pierce her inner being when she would witness all these things happening. Soon they would have to flee Bethlehem because Herod was on a rampage against her Son. They would need to live in a foreign land of prejudice and discrimination against those of Hebrew descent. Joy? Where was the joy of the birth of her Son to be found in all that for her?

And yet, for all those real life reasons to have eyes filled with tears of sadness and hearts crushed with despair, the birth of this holy One born of Mary gives everlasting reasons to rejoice now and forevermore. Those haunting sins you have committed in secret, which severely affect you and unknowingly even those around you whom you love so dearly, have redemption and healing in this One born of Mary. Your life, as disappointing as you may have come to think of it, is precious to God in heaven. He sent His Son for your reclamation. In this Bethlehem Babe your life is truly precious to God.

Jesus' enemies who challenged His person and office had no solution to our shared problem of sin and death. They just came up with more demanding and condemning law. With all such failed attempts by man-made religion we are lost. But as Sarah and Abraham found there was only misery associated with their man-made plans of Hagar and Ishmael, but in God's promised Isaac, there was laughter begun here and extending all the way to life everlasting.

My dear ones, may this be your response in this holy season of Christ's birth in the midst of your personal disappointments and despairs and as you enter the new year with possibly bleak and heartrending turn of events. Your sin was laid upon this holy Child, who took it all the way to the cross, there it died with Him and you have been raised with Him on that third day to a new life begun here and extending to all eternity.

Good Christians all, this Christmas time,
 Consider well and bear in mind
 What our good God for us has done,
 In sending his beloved Son.

With thankful heart and joyful mind

The shepherds went the babe to find,
And as God's angel had foretold,
They did our Savior Christ behold.
Within a manger He was laid,
And by His side the virgin maid,
Attending on the Lord of life,
Who came on earth to end all strife.

Good Christians all, this Christmas time,
Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done,
In sending his beloved Son.

Amen.