

# Biblical wisdom for expectant, 'older' mothers

There is a special kind of humiliation (and humor, if you're a good sport), reserved for pregnant women who skew a little bit above the average age of moms in this country. I can tell you exactly how I know: I read the fine print on the report from my baby's first ultrasound.

The text just about leapt off the page: Fetus: "alive, singleton." Amniotic fluid level: "normal range." Mother: "advanced maternal age."

When I asked a nurse about that last line, she said, "Yeah, it's an unfortunate term. When a woman delivers a baby at 35 years old, we call it a 'geriatric pregnancy.'"

Between morning sickness (which, if we really want to be technical with our terminology, should be called "all-day-and-night sickness") and chronic fatigue, the last thing I needed to hear was that I was old. Everyone knows that motherhood demands supernatural levels of energy and attention.

Sensing my discomfort, she shared that many of her patients were finding themselves pregnant well into their 30s and early 40s. Medical terms would likely catch up, she mused. "Plus," she said, "think of all that life experience and wisdom you'll bring to the table."

Riding that wave of cheerleading, I decided to spend the next two trimesters getting to know some of my geriatric foremothers to absorb some of their wisdom. I traded contemporary books, blogs and social media accounts dedicated to the subject of motherhood in your 30s for a classic — the Bible.

I started with Sarah, Abraham's wife. Sarah shared her husband's frustration as the promise of parenthood seemed to be permanently delayed. While most people remember how Abraham fumbled the situation, at several points Sarah also tried to take matters into her own hands. Her way turned out well for no one.

I think Sarah's great lesson for mothers comes at the point of Isaac's sacrifice:

Abraham names the place where God spared their son “Yahweh-yireh,” meaning, “The Lord will provide.” Later, that same place was renamed “Yireh-salem,” or “the Lord will see to the peace.”

Sarah’s story suggests that with faith and a relinquishing of the reins, we can experience how God’s plan and timing is aimed at our peace. God delivers on promised blessings, even if they are different from what we anticipate.

For Christians, peace is not necessarily the absence of conflict or chaos, nor is it even equated with happiness. It’s an integration of our inner life with God’s will, a disposition in which we let him work through us in all circumstances.

I’m confident that Sarah’s story is one that I’ll return to when things don’t go according to the plans I’ll inevitably keep making in vain.

I also spent time contemplating Elizabeth, who conceived John the Baptist “in her old age.” At first glance, the greatest thing that Elizabeth has to teach all Christian disciples, not only mothers, is revealed at the Visitation: how to recognize the Lord in our midst, even if he is concealed.

But I then got to imagining Elizabeth raising John day in and day out. If the hairshirts and diet he embraced as an adult tell us anything about his childhood, it’s that she likely had her hands full.

She might not have had the youthful energy required for the job, but she certainly cooperated with the grace that was given to her: The fruits of her labor resulted in a man who prophesied the coming of the Christ, baptized that same Christ and died for him.

Elizabeth’s lesson is that our goal is not to form our children in our image. It’s to help them understand themselves and the unique call God has placed on their hearts.

Success, then, is not measured by what advantages we give our children, when we have them or any number of temporal matters, but by what we do to help them on their path to heaven. God can do a lot with our generosity at any age.

It's a lesson I hope other mothers in my midst remind me of from time to time, as my child's personality and preferences unfold.

And thanks to a medical report, I'm glad to know that group of women includes the company of a few matriarchs and saints of "advanced maternal age."

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