

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Advent, December 5, 2010

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Hymns: 415, 91:1-3, 75, 40, 74.

Lessons: Genesis 12:1-8, Hebrews 11:8-20, Matthew 22:23-33.

Sermon Text: Genesis 22:1-19

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Bible speaks of the God of “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” several dozen times. The birth of Isaac was promised for a long time, but not nearly as long as the birth of Jesus Christ was promised. Isaac, called in the New Testament the only begotten son of his father, was to be sacrificed. His father was told to kill him, to sacrifice him, by the God who had promised that through this very son Abraham and his descendents would be blessed and become a very large nation. The Father of Jesus Christ in heaven actually sacrificed him. Isaac was rescued from this sure death by the power of God’s Word. Jesus Christ was rescued after his certain death by the power of God. Today we look at

ISAAC

- 1. The son of Abraham was promised for a long time.**
- 2. Abraham is ready to sacrifice him.**
- 3. God intervenes and sends a substitute sacrifice, just as he sent his only-begotten Son as a substitute for all mankind.**

God had told Abraham – at first called Abram – to leave his homeland and go to a land he would show him along with this promise: *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* Genesis 12:2-3. A number of times God repeated and refined that promise, as in Genesis 13:14-17: *“The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.””*

But Abraham had become an old man. He had followed God’s promise at age 75 and left his homeland. He followed God in faith, believing that God would take care of him and bless him.

God promised that he would give Canaan to Abraham and to his descendents. Scripture makes it very clear that *“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”* Romans 4:3 But Abraham was a sinful human being. In the weakness of his flesh, he often fell away from God, not always trusting that God would take care of him and sometimes doubting God’s promises. And doesn’t unbelief attack every one of us today also? There are times in the lives of every one of us when we don’t fully trust God. There are times in the lives of every one of us when we take things into our own hands just as Abraham did, because we don’t believe or think or trust that God will do really do what is necessary. One such time happened when Abraham was about 86 years old. It had been 11 years since God had promised descendents, but Abraham’s wife was beyond the age of bearing children. They had not had the promised son, so at his wife’s suggestion, Abraham took Hagar, his wife’s maidservant and had a child by her. This son was named Ishmael. This decision would prove to be trouble for Abraham’s descendents through his son Isaac up to this very day. Descendants of those half-brothers are still fighting over the land in modern-day Palestine and Israel.

But when he was 99 years old Scripture records that God renewed the promise to Abraham. He told him ***"You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."*** Then God said to Abraham, ***"As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised."*** Genesis 17:3-10. This was also the time when God set up the covenant of circumcision, something that the physical descendents of Abraham were to follow but this was just an outward symbol of the faith, the trust that they should have in the true God.

God had told him plainly: ***"your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."*** Genesis 17:19.

In Genesis 21 we read of the birth of Isaac. We are told the name means "laughter" and here you see why: ***"Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."*** Genesis 21:1-7.

Then somewhat later comes the big test for Abraham. The God who had finally given Abraham a son told him ***"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*** What a terrible blow! This was the son whom he loved! God had told him this would be the son through whom he would become a great nation. Can you imagine the heartache that Abraham must have felt? Can you imagine, especially if you are a father, what God now expects you to do?

But Abraham obeyed God. Early the next morning he got ready to go. He took two servants along with him as well as his son Isaac. He cut wood for the burnt offering. Then they all traveled for three days. Can you imagine what must have been going through Abraham's mind for those three days? Can you imagine the terrible feeling in his heart, knowing that he had to kill this son as a burnt offering? It is almost beyond comprehension. After a three-day journey, Abraham told his servants, ***"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."***

What else could he have told the servants, except ***"We will worship and then we will come back to you"?*** He still kept this terrible secret bottled up within himself. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and had his son carry the wood. In this way he is a picture of the immeasurably greater sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who in the same way carried the wood of His cross willingly and patiently and bore our sins in His body on the cross. Abraham himself carried the fire and the knife, the means that would kill his son.

Isaac wondered what was going on. ***"As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"*** Surely Isaac must've understood what burnt offerings were all about, that you would sacrifice an animal by killing it and then burning it up. He asks about the lamb for the burnt offering. That tells us that Abraham must often have sacrificed such animals as lambs to the Lord God. We can be sure that Abraham had told Isaac about the true God. He would not have permitted this son he loved so much to be ignorant of the true God who had done so much for Abraham. Much had happened to Abraham since God called him out of his native land. Abraham had been sent to a new land. Abraham had become a wealthy man. So it is inconceivable that his son Isaac would never have heard all of these things, all of these blessings that God had provided and how Abraham had sacrificed offerings to God.

Now comes the climax of the story: ***“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Did Abraham built the altar and arrange the wood while his son stood by? Did his son actually help build the altar? We don’t know the answers but these questions really don’t matter. What does matter is that he took his son, tied him up, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. “Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.”***

Can you now put yourself in Isaac’s place? What must Isaac have been thinking? Did he willingly let his father tie him up? Did he fight against his father at this point? Abraham, remember, was an old man. Isaac was a young man. We don’t know Abraham’s age for certain, but Isaac certainly could have fought his father and not allowed him to tie him up and put him on the altar. Could Isaac have been thinking his father had gone crazy? Or was Abraham explaining to his son what God had told him? Could Isaac have guessed what was going on? Whatever thoughts may have been going through Isaac’s mind, we know that his father did tie him up and did put him on the altar. His father was ready to sacrifice him, to kill him, to execute him. Surely he learned later in life that this was exactly what God had demanded.

But look at what happens. ***“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”***” This is the the angel of the Lord speaking. This is the one who is really the very Son of God, The Word, who centuries later would himself become flesh and be sacrificed after carrying his own wooden cross.

“Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” God had just put Abraham to the supreme test, the greatest test in his life. He had been told to sacrifice, to kill his only son, called in the New Testament, his only-begotten son. (Hebrews 11:17) The King James Version in Hebrews 11:17 reads “only-begotten”. That is the same Greek word that God uses to describe his very own son Jesus Christ in John 3:16. We see Abraham’s love for his son, but not nearly so great as God the Father’s. ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, [KJV: “only-begotten Son”] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** John 3:16. God did not withhold his very own son. God did sacrifice his only-begotten son. In this way Isaac is a picture of Jesus Christ.

So God resolves this. God says ‘do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not harm him.’ And then Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. And he went and sacrificed the ram as a burnt offering instead of his son. Can you imagine the relief that Abraham must have now felt? Now he could see God’s plan. Now he could see how God would bless him through Isaac and that he could become a great nation through Isaac and Isaac’s descendants. Abraham even gave that place a special name, “the Lord will provide.” In the KJV the name is “Jehovahjireh”.

Then the angel of the Lord calls to Abraham from heaven a second time and tells him ***“I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”***

Jesus Christ is the descendant through whom the world will be blessed. Because Abraham obeyed God; because Isaac was almost the sacrifice, Jesus Christ came to earth to be the complete sacrifice for all our sins. Jesus Christ died for sin in our place, as our substitute and paid the punishment we deserved for our sins. As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, let us remember the sacrifice he made for us. Amen.