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Midweek Advent I  
1 December 2010  
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita  
Genesis 17:1-17

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

Over the next four weeks we'll spend quite a bit of time in the Old Testament.

We'll learn our history, our *family* history, and what it means for us today.

We'll learn about those faithful servants who trusted the Lord for their deliverance—  
through types, images, stories, and ceremony.

Most importantly of all, though, we'll learn about Christ from the Old Testament—  
and in so doing, we'll better understand the New.

Each week we'll focus on a different Prophet of God;

1. First is Abraham, the Father of the Patriarchs, the promised heir, the one from whom Jesus descended (Mt 1:1).
2. Then comes Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham (Abraham's great-grandson)—who served as Pharaoh's right-hand man and brought the people of Israel into Egypt for food and safety.
3. Moses, who's next, brought them out!  
He's the one that received the 10 Words on Mt. Sinai,  
who led Israel through the wilderness and up to the edge of the Promised Land.
4. Finally, we'll look at David, *King* David, the author of the Psalms, the defeater of Goliath, and the Shepherd of Israel.

Each of these characters teach you about your Lord Jesus.

They are part of the story that Jesus takes up as His own and now gives you.

So today, it's Abraham, or better—*Abram* (Gen 17:1).

Abram first appears in Genesis 11:26:

**“When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.”**

Then we're told,

**“Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah...Now Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Gen 11:29-30).**

Now that's a curious detail—

**“Sarai was *barren*; she had no child.”**

When you spend time in the Holy Scriptures, don't be afraid to ask questions—

Why would the Lord include such a detail?

What is it about this *barrenness*; this *childless-ness*?

Hold on to that, let's keep tracking with Abram.

Chapter 12 begins,

**Now the Lord (that's Yahweh!) said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I'll show you. And I'll make of you a great nation, and I'll bless you and make your name great, so that you'll be a blessing. I'll bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**  
**So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.** (Gen 12:1-4)

Seemingly out of nowhere, Abram is singled out as the promised heir.

The promise first made to Eve about a son who would crush Satan's head (Gen 3:15) was carried on through Noah and his sons on the ark,  
 and now, 10 generations later, finally has made its way to Abram,  
 who is promised a good land, a great name, and,  
 in today's reading, *children*.

Now, if you've been paying attention to the story, you'd say:

Ah, but that can't be! Abram's a dead end—  
 Sarai is *barren*—she *can't* have children.

Here you begin to see what kind of God you have—

the kind that promises life and salvation, defeat of Satan, and a good land,  
 and yet gives this promise to people entirely incapable of bringing it forth.

But before we get too far into today's reading, there's a few more things we must learn.

The first deals with your bulletin cover.

It's an Eastern icon of "The Visitation of the Holy Trinity,"  
 a scene that follows our reading.

Here you have three "messengers," and yet the text from Genesis 18 begins,

**"And the Lord (again, that's Yahweh) appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, *three men* were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant" (Gen 18:1-3).**

One Lord—and yet 3 men were standing there—.

The point is that Abraham meets the Holy Trinity under the disguise of three "Visitors."  
 And what does he do? He and Sarah quickly serve, bow down, and worship—  
 they celebrate a meal together—  
 and look at the hands,  
 you'll notice each messenger blesses the bread and cup.

The other bit you must know of Abraham is his faith in the promise.

In chapter 15, Abram cries out to the Lord,

**“O Lord God (that’s Yahweh!), what will you give me, for I continue childless? Behold, you’ve given me no offspring” (Gen 15:2-3).**

The Lord responds,

**“Your very own son shall be your heir...Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you’re able...so shall your offspring be” (15:4-5).**

So story goes on: **“Abraham believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness” (15:6).**

Abram *believed* God, and it was counted to him as righteousness—  
that’s how St. Paul proves that salvation isn’t by the Law, but by the promise (Gal 3:6)—  
by *faith*, given to us as a gift by grace (Eph 2:8).

Now we’re ready for Genesis 17.

Now that we’ve got faith in order, as well as his meeting with God—the three-in-one—we come back to the promise—to the covenant.

**When Abram was 99 years old the Lord (that’s Yahweh) appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” (Gen 17:1-2).**

Multiply means kids, children, a son—an heir!

As is usual, the Lord changes Abram’s name as a sign of this covenant, this promise:

**“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but *Abraham*, for I’ve made you the father of a multitude of nations. I’ll make you exceedingly fruitful” (17:5-6).**

Now is a good time to remember Sarai—

she’s barren, remember; she’s got no kids and she’s 90 years old!

Nevertheless, the Lord has a promise for her, too:

**“As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but *Sarah*. I will bless her, and moreover, I’ll give you a son by her...and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her” (17:15-16).**

Both Abraham and Sarah will be made into nations.

From Abraham and Sarah will come kings.

To Abraham and Sarah the *promise* is given.

And the sign of this promise is circumcision:

**“You shall be circumcised, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is 8 days old among you shall be circumcised” (17:11-12).**

Circumcision doesn’t earn, merit, or work the promise into existence;  
rather, it’s the sign that the promise is already given.

All of this is good Advent preparation.

Here we have the promise of a coming child,  
 a child promised to a woman unfit for bearing,  
 a child who will draw all nations into Himself,  
 and who will be *King*.

This child will be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day,  
 showing already that the promise is sealed by the shedding of blood.

This child who comes from Abraham and Sarah is the Christ-child—  
 The King of Israel,  
 The promised Seed,  
 The heir who inherits all that the Father gives Him.

And even though  
**Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself,**  
**“Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old?**  
**Shall Sarah, who is 90, bear a child?”** (17:17)

We can't blame him.

This promise is unbelievable.

It requires that God act in a most extraordinary sort of way—  
 apart from our doing, planning, or making sense of.

If God brings forth a son to Abraham and Sarah, though Sarah be barren and 90—  
 Let Him also bring forth a Son to Joseph and Mary, though Mary be a young virgin.

Yet this isn't just any Son coming from the virgin Mary,  
 this is the Son who would say:  
**“Abraham rejoiced in seeing My day. He saw it and was glad”** (Jn 8:56).

Naturally, the Jews said to Him,  
**“You're not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”** (8:57).

Jesus kicks it up a notch and says,  
**“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM (that's *Yahweh*)”** (8:58).

Abraham prepares us well to meet the King who comes in the manger;  
 he prepares us well to meet *Yahweh*—the God of promise and deliverance,  
 the promised seed and heir,  
 who breaks all expectations of what can and should be.

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