

## **“WHAT CHILD IS THIS? ABRAHAM AND SARAH’S SON ISAAC.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**November 29, 2020, 9 and 10:30 AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Genesis 21:1-7; 22; Hebrews 11:17-19**

### **Introduction: Advent**

Advent means anticipation, expectation, coming, it's this short season when we prepare for celebrating the coming of Jesus into the world, when we prepare for the coming of the centuries long promise of God to send a Messiah, when we prepare for the fulfilment His redemptive purposes He announced and started way back in the garden of Eden when God said the seed of woman will crush the head of the serpent.

The first promise of salvation in the Bible included babies. That promised seed of woman who would crush the head of the serpent comes in the form of babies. The Bible is full of babies, God-sent babies, babies who influenced and changed the world. Out of the mouths of babes and infants God has spoken and shown Himself.

This advent season we will reflect on five babies God used to influence or change not just world history, but salvation history and eternity. They are Isaac, Moses, Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus. These are babies God used to prepare the way to crush the serpent.

### **Isaac's miraculous birth, Genesis 21:1-7.**

We like to say that all babies are a miracle, and in a sense they are. All life is a miracle of God's grace.

The birth of the baby Isaac was without a doubt a miracle in every way. The birth of baby Isaac is the first real birth narrative in the Bible. Obviously there were a lot of babies born before him, but his is the first where the details are given, details that parallel and anticipate Jesus' birth.

The announcement of his birth was laughable. Sarah laughed when the Angel of the Lord told her husband Abraham she would have a baby, him at the age of 100, she at the age of 90. They had been praying and waiting for this fulfilment of God's promise for 25 years.

When Abraham was 75 years old God called him out of the Ur of the Chaldees.

**Genesis 12:2-3** I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 ... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

**Genesis 15:4b-5** “... your very own son shall be your heir.” 5 ... “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” ... “So shall your offspring be.”

But then nothing. Years of waiting became a decade. Expectations turned into disappointment. After ten years of waiting Sarah decided to take matters into her own hands, so she gave her Egyptian servant girl to Abraham as a wife so they could get a baby since Sarah was both barren and old. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.

But there is a problem here. Ishmael was not the child God promised to Abraham and Sarah.

Ishmael was born of the will of the flesh, of the will of man, but not of the will of God. There are things that are our doing, of our efforts, out of self-reliance. Then there are things that are God's doing, according to His will, His work.

***How is the birth of Isaac God's doing?*** It's clear isn't it. God makes Abraham and Sarah wait until they are 100 and 90. Not only was Sarah barren/infertile for all her childbearing years but now she is well past any woman's childbearing years. Our text implies no one in their right mind would have ever imagined such a thing possible, this is truly a miracle of God's grace.

Can you imagine having a baby at the age of 100/90? Can you imagine having parents in their 100s as you are growing up?

God did not make Abraham a father until it was impossible for him to be a father.

***Isaac's birth points to Jesus and the fulfilment of God's covenant promises.***

Isaac is the child of promise, Isaac is the child of grace who points us to a future child of grace, born of a promise, a child of the covenant of grace, not of works. Salvation belongs to God and salvation will come from God.

Both births were announced by angels.

Both sons were a descendant of Abraham.

Both were called the only son of their father (see Genesis 22:2).

Both were fulfilled promises of God, one long promised to Abraham and Sarah, the other the long promised Messiah. In this we see the perfect faithfulness of God.

Both were miracle births, born with divine intervention, one to a barren old woman, one to a virgin with no husband. What is impossible with man, is possible with God.

Isaac's birth reminds us that our salvation is not of the flesh, not of our will, but of God.

**John 1:12-13** To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

We are only children of God because He has done the impossible and saved us through Jesus Christ. We are made His children by an act of His power and sovereign grace, and not our wills.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Isaac's birth reminds us that all children are the gift of God's kindness. It is only by God's power and grace that we increase and multiply.

**Psalm 127:3** Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Are you really clear about this? Your children aren't yours, they aren't your doing, they are God's. We are full of vanity and pride and self-delusion, if we say look what I have done. No, look what God has done. Abraham had no room for pride, no room for boasting.

After the birth narrative only one other story is told of young Isaac, it also points to Jesus.

**Isaac's near death experience, Genesis 22:1-14; Hebrews 11:17-19.**

**Genesis 22:1-2** After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

This is a story that cuts to the core of all our emotions and understandings about God. To lose an only son is a most grievous thing. To lose a son to a violent death even harder still. But to be the instrument of that violent death is beyond imagining. We cannot begin to fathom the inner spiritual conflict and utter grief Abraham bore on that three day journey, to lose the son who had brought laughter and joy finally into their family.

Everything was at stake here, everything hanging in the balance. Abraham's family, his future, his faith, God's promises, the future salvation of the world, being a blessing to all nations.

Everything about Isaac's sacrifice points to the purpose of Jesus becoming a baby in order to be sacrificed by His own Father.

Both had a 3-day experience.

The father leads his son to be sacrificed.

They leave their "homeland" to go to the place of sacrifice (Abraham & Isaac travel to the mountain, Jesus leaves heaven to come to earth).

The sacrifices take place on the same mountain (called Mt. Moriah in the Old Testament, called Mt. Calvary in the New Testament — also known as Mt. Zion).

The son carried the wood/cross to the place of sacrifice.

Both asked a question of their father, or cried out to their father.

The son was submissive to the will of the father.

The father was willing to sacrifice his son, if necessary.

The father believed in resurrection. A resurrection was prophesied (Abraham said, "we'll come back to you." Jesus said, "I will rise on the third day.")

The son was bound to the wood/cross.

The Lord Himself provided the sacrifice (the ram, Jesus).

The sacrifice was a substitute (male ram a substitute for Isaac, Jesus a substitute for us).

Blood was shed.

The sacrifice was a demonstration of love for God.

Abraham was tested, Jesus was tested. Abraham obeyed trusting the providence of God.

Both sons ultimately survived the sacrifice. The son was resurrected on the third day.

There is one huge difference. God had no intention of killing Isaac or allowing him to die, He was only testing Abraham.

Isaac's question illustrates the importance and need for substitutionary atonement and substitutionary salvation. "Father, where is the Lamb?" That's *the* eternal question. "Father, where is the Lamb? Where is the substitute? It is the question that begs for an answer and waits for an answer for 2000 years when "God will provide."

The entire sacrificial system of the OT with all the countless millions of sacrifices offered on this very mountain over the next two thousand years teach us and prepare us and help us anticipate Jesus' substitution and ultimate sacrifice once and for all on the cross for our sins.

Abraham and Isaac had a most profoundly visceral experience of the Gospel there on Mt. Moriah were it would be put on display 2000 years later.

Can you imagine their joy in see that ram in the thicket? Holy joy, holy relief. Oh, that we would see as clearly the promised child, the grace-child, the miracle child.

Isaac, whose name means laughter, anticipates the laughter and joy of heaven over so great a salvation won. Indeed the serious business of heaven is joy, the angels rejoice at every salvation. And what joy awaits us when we enter into the joy of our Master.

### **Implications and application.**

Baby Isaac confronts us in several ways this morning.

*Waiting for God's promises.* Sometimes it's nine months, sometimes it is far longer. God's promises, God's ways, God's timing can be hard. In the waiting God is sanctifying us, disciplining us, humbling us, teaching us to love Him, to fear Him, to trust Him. God is faithful.

*Waiting for God in impossibilities.* What impossibility are you confronted with right now?

Have you fallen into a rut spiritually and run out of ways out?

Is a child or grandchild rejecting Jesus and not open to talking about it?

Are the tensions getting worse at work with no hope for change?

Are you facing another year of chronic pain or unbearable sickness?

Is there some unresolvable conflict in your family?

Do you have a 25 year old prayer waiting for an answer?

God creates impossible situations in our lives to magnify His power and sovereign grace and goodness. And to keep us in humble dependence on Him, so we will trust His power and grace.

God does this in our lives for the same reason He did it in Abraham's life, to show him that nothing is too hard for God (Genesis 18:14).

We don't or won't face what Abraham faced, but we will all be put to the test. God knows our infirmity and weakness, and will not try us more than we can endure. But He also knows where we must be refined in the fires of His loving discipline and affliction.

How is Covid testing us? It is testing what we love, what we care about, what matters most to us. God is testing us, trying us as in a furnace. It is long, calling for patient faithfulness.

What would God have to do in your life, to come to the point of saying to you, "Now I know that you fear God."

"Real satisfaction comes not in understanding God's motives, but in understanding His character, in trusting in His promises, and in leaning on Him and resting in Him as the Sovereign who knows what He is doing and does all things well" (Joni Eareckson Tada).

**II Corinthians 1:9** We felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

If we want to grow in our relationship with our loving Father in heaven, we will have to trust and obey in the midst of vulnerability and sacrifice and lose and waiting.

*Waiting for God's provision.*

Father, where is the Lamb? God uses Isaac to point us to the promised lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Behold the Lamb of God, our substitute who takes as the sins of the world, who takes away the righteous wrath of God and reconciles us to our heavenly Father.

**Romans 8:32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

We are invited to this table on which are the symbols of this greatest sacrifice for the greatest and most undeserving sinners. Here is love, the love of the Father for the Son and the love of God for the world, and our Father's love for His beloved children.