

Grace, Mercy and Peace are now yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

This advent we are taking some time to ask a rather simple question. Who is Jesus? It is an obvious question for those of us in church, but just think for a moment about the enormous impact He has had on the world. More attention has been given to Jesus; more opposition has been put against Him, more devotion rendered to Him, more adoration than any other person in the history of our world. Every recorded word that Jesus said has been sifted, analyzed, scrutinized, debated and fought over – every word. The words of Jesus have been studied more than all the kings and queens, wiseman, philosophers, scientists or famous authors, Jesus words stand alone in this category. Now 2000 years after Jesus spoke them, there isn't a minute that goes by on this Earth that millions of people are not studying, marking and learning from the words of Jesus. Think about that for a moment, a person who lived 2000 years ago in a strange corner of a now dead empire, yet his birth now divides our calendar – AD and BC. Before Christ and Anno Domini, the year of our Lord.

Just who is this person? Just who is Jesus? That's the question we are wrestling with this advent season. Last week we looked at Jesus through one of His forefathers David. David, God's servant, king over all Israel. We saw Jesus through David the king as Christ, the king over all reigning on David's throne. This week we look at another ancestor of our Lord and Savior as we seek to know who this Jesus is. We turn to Matthew's genealogy in his first chapter and read: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Tonight we turn from the Kingship of David and see what it means for Jesus to be a Son Abraham. Yet when we talk about the famous son of Abraham our first thought isn't Christ our Lord, but rather the son that was promised to Abraham: his son Isaac – the son of sacrifice as we read in our Old Testament reading this evening. We see our Lord and Savior Jesus – as a Son of Sacrifice.

Many of us have heard and remember the story of Isaac. It is one of the most dramatic and rather frightening stories in the Old Testament. Abraham and his wife Sarah had been trying to have a child all of their adult lives together. One day they were visited by God and promised that in their old age they would have a son. Hearing this Sarah laughed. Yet at the old age of one-hundred for Abraham and ninety for Sarah, the son is born, the long awaited son. His name is Isaac which in Hebrew means laughter. The impossible happened to them, God had provided a son and Isaac brought Abraham and Sarah great joy!

This long awaited child grew and God returned Abraham and spoke these chilling words to him: " Take now, your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." Can you imagine what Abraham went through hearing these words? Do you really mean it God? Did He really say that to me? Are you sure? The long awaited and

gifted child was now going to be ripped away. God has provided and now it seemed as though the hand of the Lord was going to demand it back.

We can hardly imagine the difficulty and agony of hearing those words from the mouth of the Lord.. We have had those moments where our hearts leap into our throats and all in one moment feel broken. Our experiences bring agony as well. A child is born with a life threatening illness, a beloved Grandmother dies, a career comes crashing down, a painful diagnosis is heard from a doctor. We have all had moments where life took a dramatic turn against where you thought it was going. Those moments where your heart jumps into your throat.

It is so easy for us to get lost in despair in these moments. We lose ourselves in our jobs, we ignore the pain in our leisure, our anger burns with hatred and revenge. Yet as Christian we remember that Jesus comes. Jesus helps. Jesus provides. And why is that? Jesus is the Son of Abraham. Jesus is the Son of Sacrifice.

Before this horrific word from God came to Abraham our text says this: "After these things God tested Abraham." What does "after these things" mean? What things? Abraham has seen the Lord faithfully guide him from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran and then to Canaan. God lead each step of the way. Abraham has heard the Lord promise to Him: "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Abraham witnessed the miraculous birth of Isaac. What does it all mean? It means that for years God has been showing and promising to Abraham that He is a Faithful God. God has shown that He will be faithful and true to Abraham. It means that God has been preparing Abraham for this Test, long before it was given.

God has been preparing each and everyone of us to for the trials and tests of this life. God has prepared us through our Baptisms, giving to us promises of His love, grace and life eternal. God has been speaking to Gospel to you, reminding you that Christ has died and rose that your sins might be forgiven and your future secure in Jesus. God prepares you through the Lord's supper, that through this meal you might have forgiveness, strength, joy and confidence that Christ is with you and for you. Through these means of grace God pours out upon us courage and confidence, wisdom strength and the ability to trust in God. We are not left to our own devices to deal with the trials and tests of life, God has been preparing and strengthening us to face them throughout our lives.

Yet why go through these? Why face these sufferings and difficulty? Why is Abraham dragging His one and only son up the mountain to sacrifice him? The power that looks to destroy us, to hurt and harm us. These test and trials come to help us lean more and more on the one who is in control of all things. To lead us to lives that reflect who we are as Christians and to strengthen our faith. 1 Peter offers this insight into trials and tests: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold., which perishes even though refined by fire – may be tested genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Why? Why me? Why me now? Why this? These are words we all have spoken in the midst of trials and tests. God's tests aren't intended to destroy us or renounce our faith, but rather to refine us. They mature us. They season us. They humble us. God tests us to strengthen us to deepen our trust in the faithfulness of God.

So we return to our story. There Abraham is, standing over his son. The darkest of moments. Where the world gasps in horror about what appears to be happening. The promised Son was going to be taken. Yet at the last moment an angel of the Lord calls out to Abraham and says to him: Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." God provides for Abraham in this test. Sparring the Son, God gives a ram caught in the thorns. Our text says: "He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place, 'The Lord will provide.' And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'"

In the midst of the trials and test that we face, God does not send us to face them alone. God is with His people in the midst of them. He sees Israel in bondage in Israel and lifts up Moses to lead them out, He sees David standing against Goliath and brings the victory, He sees Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and stands with them in the midst of the fiery furnace. God provides for his people in the midst of test and trials. He does not leave us alone, but lifts Christians around us to walk with us. He gives to us the sacraments to strengthen our faith and He gives to us promises that we can hold onto when all else seems to fall away.

The God of Abraham and Isaac is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus we have been given the ultimate provision. Paul writes in Romans 8: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things." God spared Isaac, provided for His people, but he didn't spare Jesus.

Jesus willingly took the wood and dragged it up the mountain. It wasn't Moriah, but Golgotha. There would be no substitute ram this time. God Himself would be arrested abruptly. Tried unjustly, sentenced callously, mocked by those who he came to save, abandoned by his followers, beaten brutally, crucified barbarously. Here once and for all, the sacrifice for all people was offered. The son of God became the perfect sacrifice, taking upon himself the sins of the world. The failures, brokenness, and evil of the world was put on His shoulders and Christ died.

Amongst it was our own sin. Our failure to love others as we should. Our failure to live as God has called us to live. Living for our own desires and pleasures instead of following Christ. All of it demanding our death because of our sin. Yet Christ was provided where our death was required. Christ dies in our place, God does not spare Him and gives to him the death we all deserve.

Yet Christ has risen triumphantly! The death that he suffered has been destroyed, death has been defeated, Christ is alive, never to die again. Death has no dominion over

Christ our King. For those baptized in Christ, for those who trust in this Jesus, our future is with Him. Our sin has been forgiven, we have been redeemed and Christ himself is with us. This is our hope as Christians in this world full of trials and tests. When all else seems to be breaking away. When this world seems to be throwing all at you and you are overwhelmed, beaten and tired. Remember that the Lord provides. How do we know? Jesus is the son of Abraham, Jesus provides for us himself. In Christ name, Amen.