

The Rock: 11-28-2021**Advent: The Road to Bethlehem**

First reading: Luke 1:46-55

Title: Once upon a time...

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-9 (black bible
Pg. 8)

Theme:

The journey of faith starts with obedience to step into the promises of God.

Introduction:

Every good story many of us heard growing up, started with: "Once upon a time."

We tend not to look at the Bible in that way however, because that would make it a "fairy tale". Which it isn't, but I think that this is the greatest story ever told and ought to begin with once upon a time.

Afterall, these are actually real people like us, trying to navigate life and all its challenges. Add to that the fact that God has called them to certain things, and every step on that journey was taken by faith, not knowing how it would turn out.

As I sat to write for Advent this year, my thoughts were of the Christmas season and all that it's filled with, and what I look forward to -Third Day began to play "O come let us adore Him"

Yes, I am one of those who start with the Christmas music a bit early. I found it a great way to start and to think on here right at the beginning of Advent.

So why are we here in Genesis 12 talking about Abraham?

Well, I think in the simplest of terms, God is a God of promises fulfilled, and it is here that we find the beginning of a faith journey that will impact all of humanity.

One that sets in motion the plan to bring God's creation and his people back to Him. It is the promise He made to us, when Adam and Eve had to leave Eden, that he would fix what we have broken, our covenant relationship with Him.

Little did Abraham, or anyone know that it would be through broken humanity, that God would fix broken humanity.

In what we are calling: The Road to Bethlehem -The promise fulfilled, we are going to take the time to visit with different people along the time-line leading to the King in a cradle.

All of these people: Abraham, Ruth, Hannah, David and finally Luke, had challenges and choices to make as they, by faith, trusted the God of the Bible and His promises to them.

Ultimately becoming part of the promise that a Messiah will come and fix not just our world, but our relationship with God the Father.

The Story:

Every Christmas season I am reminded to just keep it simple. The story tells itself, really. That's true. But what about all these Old testament people and things? How do the promises tie together from Genesis through to Luke?

That, to me, is as important for us to understand, especially in our time where we have moved beyond the Biblical story, and at times history itself.

But again, these were real people of history, not some made up fable. They came from, and lived in places we can find on a map.

If you were inclined to do so, you could visit many of these places today.

That's why it's good to journey backwards at times to see the faithfulness of people just like us. Simply doing life,

trying to figure out the call of God in their lives.

Because everyone of us, like Father Abraham, makes that choice to obey the voice which calls us -Calls us to Bethlehem, and ultimately to the cross, outside the city -where our King bled and died for us. (But that is the other book end -Easter)

We want to see the beginning of the greatest story ever told, and it started with a list of names -as it always seems to.

-Genesis 11:27-32 (ESV)

"Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they

settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran."

The Bible seems to show us the importance of history, of where we come from and how we got here. All the good, the bad, and the ugly -if we aren't careful, we miss these people and the things God did through them.

Abram -whom we know as Abraham, was a pagan from Ur, a Chaldean city. It happened to be one of the most advanced cities of the time, so when Terah, Abram's dad decides to leave and head to Haran, it was most likely a business move. Somewhat like moving from Manhattan to San Francisco.

But that's not what we want to look at, even though it helps us understand that these people were more like us than we think. What I want us to see here is found in verse 30. Sarai was barren, she had no children.

In the words of Dickens from my favorite story: "this must be distinctly understood or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate."

God was moving in this family, and preparing them to be part of this journey to bring about God's promise of salvation.

Abram was 75, which would make Sarai 65, two people far beyond the years of being able to bear children. Also, when you think about it, how many people even today, decide at 75 to leave everything they know and have worked for, for something and someplace they have never even seen?

But this just what Abram did.

-Genesis 12:1 (ESV)

"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

This is so backwards of a call, that it makes very little sense. Nobody left their fathers house, their land and their livelihood for the unknown. It's just not what was done in those days.

A son learned from his father, then took over the family business, creating this "circle of life" concept which carried on from generation to generation.

This probably doesn't make sense to us today for a couple reasons. Mass movement of people. We can and do just pick up and go, starting whatever career we feel led to.

Never thinking, as Abram would, that I am born to be in the family business, right here as we have always been.

But one day, Abram hears God's voice telling him to do what no one has ever done. Leave it all and go. Go where? "To the land that I will show you."

That's all this guy's given. Go west young man. Kind of like that Horace Greely call, right? How far? Which town? If I find any along the way, that is.

After all, you are asking me to head out to what seems like hillbilly-ville, where people don't even cook their food or live in houses.

Don't worry about any of that, I'll let you know when you get there. Wow. Any of you willing to step into that kind of an adventure? Probably not.

But remember, the life of faith is exactly that kind of adventure. One of faith, of believing in the promises of God without seeing. Trusting as He is leading you and guiding you each step of the way.

To know that the blessing of God is poured out on us through the faithful obedience of His people.

Listen Abe, you don't need to know where you are going to land, you just need to step out your door because that's where the promise lies:

-Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)

"And 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. I will 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."

A great nation. A great name. A blessing. Really? My wife and I are geezers and we have no kids. Those who bless me, bless you (people don't even know me. I'd just be a vagabond wanderer)

But if they curse me, dishonor me, they are actually cursing you and dishonoring you. Huh...

God is taking a somebody, and making him a nobody in order to turn him into a nation of somebodies who will bless the world.

But it doesn't make sense because he has no kids.

-Genesis 12:3b (ESV)

"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Really? This is why 11:30 is so important to remember. Sarai is 65 and has no kids. People's names are great or remembered for a couple of things, besides the fact that they have a family to carry that name forward.

One- They do great things and are remembered for them

Two-They do really bad things and are remembered for them.

These words define the greatness of this man Abram, in the midst of so many unanswered questions:

-Genesis 12:4a (ESV)

"So Abram went, as the Lord had told him..."

This is obedience, this is trust. This is faith in action. To believe, in spite of all you know and see. That God will fulfill His promises which He has given to you.

"As the LORD told him...", is such a powerful set of words. None of it makes sense. How can the road to Bethlehem start in a place called Haran in the far east section of modern-day Iraq / Iran?

Well, the promises of God are true! They work themselves out through the obedience of faithful people.

Abram believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness, we are told more than once in the New Testament.

Thousands of years later, a man by the name of Matthew, picked up a pen and a piece of parchment and he started another list of names. After all, it seems to always start that way, remember?

-Matthew 1:1-2a (ESV)

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac..."

We discover that Abram, now Abraham did have a son, a son of a promise -Isaac, who much like his dad, journeyed by faith.

So, what's so important about Matthew's list of names? Well, it's how he bookends the list, how it shows the promises of God, and the faithfulness of His people to believe Him, to step into and be part of His plan.

-Matthew 1:16 (ESV)

"and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."

Joseph too, was challenged with the absurd and the impossible. That his betrothed was pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

-Matthew 1:18 (ESV)

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit."

Not the easiest story to sell to your husband, but here it is on the pages of Scripture.

Joseph had to sort this out. He had to decide whether he was going to believe the story, if he would believe the promises of God made to Father Abraham so long ago in the past, that all nations would be blessed through Him.

Could this be, that God once again was moving among His people, just like he did then?

How difficult would this be for any of us men, and women today to process? Very, I suspect because it's just not normal, in

fact it's so abnormal as to be unbelievable.

Abraham believed though. Sarah did too. They believed in God and His promises, that he is faithful to them all, and we know now that they all have found their yes and amen in Jesus.

"Once upon a time, in a tiny town called Nazareth, there lived a man named Joseph, and he believed some very very strange things..."

Yet, this is no fairy-tale. Joseph heard a voice as well, as an angel came to visit him:

-Matthew 1:20-23 (ESV)

"But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)"

This is the Road to Bethlehem -the promise of God fulfilled. God working in

and through His obedient people, who stepped out of their comfort zones and dared to believe. By faith.

That what God had promised would come to pass. That it would happen because people stepped into a faith relationship with Him. Deciding that His promises were true and worth the risk.

That's the question for all of us -Do we believe? Is this Jesus of Nazareth the one?

Jesus -who saves us from our sins.
Immanuel -who is God with us.

Christmas is the declaration that the world needs a savior, and that God has freely given His Son to us. Have you started that journey of faith?

Have you ever thought through this story and asked the question: Could this all be true? Could this (HE) be the answer to my dilemma?

Yes, it is. Yes, HE is. The challenge we all face is this: Can we be like Abraham, and go, go to Him in faith. Can we be like Joseph, and believe. Can we get up and step into what looks like an impossible truth and believe anyway?

The faith journey will always have its ups and downs, of that there is no doubt.

But in Christ, the blessings of God are poured out upon you.

Come to Him. Consider Him. This King in a cradle -He will change you and your world -from the inside out.