

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 2: LEADER

Jesus, the Root of Jesse's Tree

Genesis 22:1–18; Hebrews 11:17–22

OPENING

Pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Advent 2; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 841)

INTRODUCTION

O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
Free them from Satan's tyranny
That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel! (*LSB* 357:4)

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. . . . In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of Him shall the nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious” (Isaiah 11:1, 10). Last week, we saw that Jesus is the Seed of the Jesse Tree, first promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). About seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, He was identified as the “root of Jesse” who would come to bear the good fruit of eternal life for sinners (Isaiah 11:10). But before Isaiah could prophesy about Jesus as the Root, the promise of the Seed had to be preserved through Abraham.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q1. Read Genesis 12:1–3, 7 and Galatians 3:7–9, 16. What is the scope and content of the promises made to Abram (later renamed Abraham)? How are these promises fulfilled?

A1. The scope of promises that the Lord made to Abraham is practically limitless, affecting “all the families of the earth.” The content is that all these people will be blessed in the offspring (or Seed) who would come from Abraham's loins. St. Paul makes much of the fact that “offspring” is singular, which is a direct reference to Christ, who would give up His life and rise on Easter to justify all nations, Jew and Gentile alike. Now, all who trust in Christ are “sons of Abraham,” children of God's promises that are fulfilled in Christ.

Transition: God gave these promises to Abram when he was seventy-five years old. God again appeared in a vision to Abram in Genesis 15 to renew the promises, and “he believed the LORD, and He counted it to” Abram as righteousness (v. 6). When Abraham was ninety-nine, the Lord established the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17), and the next year appeared to Abraham to announce that Isaac would be born in about one year.

Q2. Considering the twenty-five years that Abraham had to wait for the Lord to fulfill the promise of a son, what narrative effect does this have when we reach God's test of Abraham in Genesis 22:1–2? What effect would this have had on Abraham as a flesh-and-blood man? How does Abraham overcome any hesitation to obey God's command? See Hebrews 11:17–19.

A2. Narratively, it is shocking to see Abraham prepare to sacrifice his son, especially after ten chapters in Genesis devoted to his life and twenty-five years of God's promises. Although the narrative indicates no hesitation on Abraham's part, as a man with emotions (as well as sin), Abraham must have experienced great sorrow, confusion, and doubt over the Lord's command. However, by faith he was able to overcome any doubts because he trusted that God never lies (Titus 1:2) and believed in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come (Hebrews 11:17–19).

Transition: There is no question that Abraham's example of trust in God's promises and commands is outstanding and worthy of imitation. The Epistle to the Hebrews places great emphasis on Abraham's faith. In the Epistle of James, the emphasis is somewhat different.

Q3. According to James 2:20–24, what insights should we draw from the example of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac? Does this contradict Paul's teaching about justification in Romans 4:1–5? Why or why not?

A3. James uses the example of Abraham to demonstrate that faith apart from works is useless or dead (James 2:17) because the lack of obedience to God's Word visibly shows a lack of faith. If Abraham had not been willing to sacrifice Isaac, that clearly would have shown he did not believe God's promises and the power of God to raise the dead. Only God can see the faith of the heart; when it comes to giving evidence of our faith, this must be outwardly shown through works.

St. Paul is dealing with a different problem in Romans 4. There, he is fighting against the pharisaical works-righteousness that believes works of the law are what make us righteous before God. James shows that works of faithfulness demonstrate our justification in the sight of other humans, but Paul emphatically excludes works from our justification "before God" so that we do not have anything to boast about. Rather, our justification before God is completely for the sake of Christ's blood and righteousness without our works, received by faith. Abraham was justified by faith in Genesis 15, but then he demonstrated his faith in Genesis 22 when he was tested by God. As the hymn explains beautifully:

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone
And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known,
With love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify;
Works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living. (*LSB* 555:9)

Transition: It is interesting to note that this passage is the first instance of the word *love* in the Bible, when God describes Isaac as Abraham's son "whom you love" (Genesis 22:2). God is not testing Abraham's love but Abraham's faith.

Q4. Read Romans 5:8–9 and 1 John 4:7–11. How does God show His love to us, and how is His love to manifest itself in our lives?

A4. While it would be too much to say that God loved us *more* than He loved Jesus, the extent of God's love is that He sent the holy, innocent Son to give up His life as a ransom for the masses and to rise on Easter to justify all mankind by His blood. What God did not finally require of Abraham (the death of his only beloved son), God requires of Himself in giving up in death His only-begotten and beloved Son. Like the ram caught in the thicket who dies in the place of Isaac, Jesus is the Lamb of God who dies in our place and takes away the sin of the world. This message is to be received by faith alone, and, through

God's gift, we are saved from the wrath of God that He has stored up for unbelievers. This wonderful love of God for us is then to flow through us into love toward our neighbor.

Transition: Abraham's twenty-five-year wait for his promised son was miniscule in comparison with the seven hundred years between Isaiah's prophecy that the "root of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1) would come. According to Acts 13:22–23, Jesus was that promised offspring, a Savior for Israel.

Q5. What counsel does the Root of Jesse give to His Church in Revelation 22:16–21? Although He has promised to return soon, what would be the purpose for Him delaying? See 2 Peter 3:8–10.

A5. Jesus is the "root and descendant of David" who, through the Holy Spirit and His Bride, the Church, invites us to come and enjoy the water of life in Holy Baptism completely for free, and promises He is coming soon to take us to Himself in heaven. In the meantime, we are to carefully teach His word of truth, not adding to nor subtracting from it. It has been about two thousand years since He promised to return, and His delay might seem that He is slow in fulfilling His promises—or even worse, we might lose hope that He is coming at all. But we must remember that He views time differently than we do, and His example in dealing with Abraham and Israel encourages us not to lose hope as we await His return. His delay is really a demonstration of His patience and desire that all reach repentance and can be spared eternal death on the Last Day.

Transition: The apostle Paul also refers to Jesus as "the root of Jesse" by citing Isaiah 11:10.

Q6. According to Romans 15:8–13, who are the beneficiaries of the work of the Root of Jesse? What benefits do they receive from Him?

A6. Isaiah 11:10 shows that not only Jews but also Gentiles will inquire of the Messiah and enter His resting place. Paul uses this passage to demonstrate that Jesus as Messiah has shown mercy to Jew and Gentile alike. This results in praise, hope, peace, and belief by the power of the Holy Spirit so all may "abound in hope" of life eternal.

CONCLUSION

"If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Romans 8:31–34). In Christ Jesus, the Root of Jesse, we have justification, an intercessor with the Father, and the promise that God will give us "all things!" What more could we ask for?

Close with prayer.

CLOSING

Pray: O Father in heaven, You sent Your only-begotten, beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Root of Jesse's tree and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Grant to us, who have been grafted into Christ through Holy Baptism, a steadfast faith like Abraham's, who demonstrated that he was justified by faith through his work of his obedience to You; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 2: STUDENT

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OPENING

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QUESTIONS

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