

Advent Midweek 1 – December 2, 2015
Text: Genesis 15:16
Theme: Keep the Faith (Abraham)

Good evening! I am Abraham, the patriarch of the OT era. I've come to your church this evening to bring you greetings of the Advent season. My greeting for you is just three words: "KEEP THE FAITH!" The faith I'm talking about is the faith in Jesus Christ which our gracious God has given to you—and also gave to me many years ago, even before Jesus was born!

When I was born back then in Ur of the Chaldees (that's the part of the world which you know as Iraq and Iran), my father Terah named me Abram. You, however, know me better by the name God later gave me, Abraham. Abram means "exalted father," and Abraham means "father of many."

The turning point in my life came when I was 75. God spoke directly to me. God still speaks to you today, but he does it through the book you call the Bible. It's important for you to realize that God is speaking to you when you read the Scriptures.

In those days before much of the Bible was written, God often spoke directly to his people. His message to me was a challenging one: "Take your wife, Sarai, and your nephew, Lot; leave your father and the rest of your family behind, and go to a new land which I will show you!" I didn't question him. God said "Go!" and so I began the

long journey westward, stopping finally when God told me to settle in the land known as Canaan.

When God commanded me to leave my father's home and go to a new land, he also gave me the following words of promise: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

These last words are very important. God said that all people would be blessed through me. The Messiah he had originally promised to Adam and Eve would be born of my descendants, Jesus Christ, my great great great great grandson would bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth, to all peoples. That is the reason you're here in church, and the reason I've come to speak to you in this Advent service.

Back in Canaan, I had become wealthy, but I wasn't happy; Sarah and I still had no children, even though God had promised we would have many descendants. About that time, three strangers stopped by my home for a visit. I, of course, invited them to eat with me. Afterward, as they prepared to continue their journey, I realized that these strangers were not ordinary people. Two of them turned out to be angels, and the third was God himself! Before they left,

God told me that Sarah would have a baby that year. Sarah overheard that and laughed out loud because she was 90 years old! That's what the name Isaac means: laughter. Our faith had wavered many times over the years, but God did just as he said he would do and gave us a son. We should have kept the faith better. Why would we ever doubt God?

When I was 75, he told me that my descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the seashore. Finally, when I was 100 years old, my son Isaac was born! Oh, how happy Sarah and I were! I loved Isaac more than anything else. That is why I was so troubled when God ordered me to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and offer him there as a sacrifice. But I had learned some things by then and I kept the faith, knowing that God always keeps his promises: descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky is what he had said.

I began the three-day journey from our home to Mount Moriah, the mountain on which King Solomon later built the temple of the Lord. As we neared the mountain, I instructed the servants to wait at that place for our return, and Isaac and I went on alone. As Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice, he asked me where the animal was, and I told him that God would provide it. I kept the faith, but I was scared.

We came to the mountain top and I tied Isaac up and put him on the altar. As I raised my knife to kill him, God ordered me to stop and substitute the ram that was caught by his horns in a nearby thorn bush. The place where God told me to sacrifice Isaac is next to Golgotha. A ram was caught by thorns to substitute for my son and, on Golgotha, Jesus, wearing a crown of thorns, died as my substitute. God loved us so much that he was willing to sacrifice his only Son, that you and I might live—not only for a few more years, but forever!

Faith is the key. Faith was given to you in your Baptism. It is strengthened when you hear the Word of God and receive his body and blood. The purpose of this Advent season is to strengthen your faith as you wait for God to keep his promises. He promised to make me the father of many nations and by uniting us in Baptism, he has made me the father of all Christians. He promised to send the Savior: to make full payment for your sins, and claim you as his children. He kept that promise. And he promises that Christ will return again to bring this world to a close and receive us into life eternal. He will keep that promise too. Keep the faith!