

"Jesus is the Son of Abraham"

Grace, peace and mercy are yours from our God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

More attention; more devotion; more adoration; and more opposition has been given to Jesus than any other person – ever. Every word recorded that Jesus said has been sifted, analyzed, scrutinized, debated – literally, every word. More than all of the kings and queens, philosophers and scientists put together. After 2,000 years, there is not one minute on earth goes by that millions are not studying what He said. Think about that, I mean, really, think about that. Here's a person who lived in a tiny land two millennia ago, yet his birth marks the passing of time – BC, before Christ and AD, *Anno Domini*, the year of our Lord.

Just who is this person? Just who is Jesus? That's the question we're contemplating this Advent Season. *Who is Jesus?* And our guide will be the Apostle Matthew. In our First Reading tonight we heard a very familiar part of Abraham's story. So, if I asked the question, "Who is Abraham's famous son?" I would imagine your answer would be Isaac – the son of sacrifice. But in our Gospel reading we heard: "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" (Mt 1:1). So the answer to the question "Who is Abraham's famous son?" the answer would also be Jesus – *Jesus is the true Son of sacrifice.*

That story of Abraham and Isaac is probably one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. God had promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child who would be the first in a long line of descendants. But 25 years passed without the fulfillment of that promise. But finally, at the ripe old age of one-hundred for Abraham and ninety for Sarah, a miraculous birth took place. They appropriately named him Isaac. In Hebrew Isaac means "laughter." The birth of Isaac was the most hilarious thing that could have happened to Abraham and Sarah and his birth brought them great joy.

But some years after Isaac's birth God speaks these haunting words to Abraham, "*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.” (Gn 22:2).*

You and I actually know something of what Abraham felt. We’ve had our heart leap into our throat. We’ve been filled with panic, buried our head in tears and anguish. We know what it’s like to see a beautiful day suddenly change into dark clouds, storm, lightning, and tempest.

A child is born with spina bifida. A mother or father dies. A career just can’t get off the ground. A husband has dementia and doesn’t know you anymore. A childhood is ripped apart by an alcoholic parent. A constant state of depression refuses to lessen its grip. A miscarriage still hurts – even after all these years. The list could go on and on.

At such points in life, it’s easy to get lost in despair. Maybe we bury ourselves in work, or the internet or TV or alcohol. Or we express our pain in anger, hatred, and revenge. But the message tonight is that, in the midst of this mess, Jesus comes. Jesus helps. Jesus provides. He does this because Jesus is the Son of Abraham, Jesus is the Son of sacrifice.

Just prior to the words I read earlier we heard this: *“After these things God tested Abraham.”* (Gn 22:1). The key words there are *“after these things.”* But what things? Those things were all the things God had done for Abraham. Abraham had seen the LORD faithfully guide him from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran and then to Canaan. He had heard the LORD say, *“I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens.”* (Gn 15:5). Abraham had witnessed the miraculous birth of Isaac. For years God had prepared Abraham for this moment.

And He has prepared us, too. He has washed and forgiven us in Baptism, fed and strengthened us in the Lord’s Supper, spoken His promises and love into our hearts through His Word, and walked with us through difficulties of one sort or another. Through all of these the Holy Spirit prepares us for life with forgiveness, love, and mercy. Through God’s means of grace, He pours courage and confidence, insight and wisdom into us. Whatever the test we’re going through is, it isn’t random, it’s not an accident. Nothing we experience surprises our loving God. Every test is Father-filtered. Whatever it is, God has prepared us for it.

*“God tested Abraham...”* (Gn 22:1). When a storm hits an eagle it initially looks like the

storm's fury will crush the eagle against a rocky cliff. But the eagle faces the storm, tilts its wings at the proper angle, and slowly the fury that might have crushed it begins to drive it upward until it rises above the storm. What's true of eagles can be true for us. *The power that looks to destroy us is the same power by which we rise to new heights.* God sends tests to bring us to greater heights of confidence and courage. There's a purpose for the test.

I can only say that because it's what God says. *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had 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."* (1 Pt 1:6–7).

I once heard a story about a young man who was taking a philosophy course. He'd studied, and studied – and studied some more! When he came to the final exam, the professor wanted to see just how much philosophy the young people in his class had absorbed and how well they could think. The final exam was one word: "Why?" The young man thought for a while, wrote his answer and walked out. The question was "Why?" His answer was: "Because!"

Why? Do you ever ask that question when you're going through a test? Why? Why me? Why me now? Why this? And God answers, "Because." But He also adds these words, "Because I love you right where you are, but I love you too much to leave you right where you are!" Those tests refine us. They humble us. They mature us. They season us.

You see, God tests us to strengthen us. But Satan tests us to destroy us. Satan attacks us at the weakest points of our life in order to bring us down, to defeat us. Did you ever have a teacher in high school or college who said on the first day of class, "Half of this class is going to fail this course!" I've never personally had that but I've heard of other people who did. Wouldn't that just make your day? And the way it was said it appeared that the professor would take great joy in failing those who don't measure up. That's not the God of Abraham and Isaac. God's tests aren't intended to destroy us. *God's tests are intended to develop us.*

And that's what God did for Abraham. Upon seeing a ram caught in a thicket Abraham

*"went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, 'The LORD will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.' "*(Gn 22:13-14). That's the way of our God. Our God sees the need of Noah and provides an ark. He sees Israel in Egyptian bondage and provides a way through the Red Sea. He sees David out-muscled by Goliath and provides a rock with which to hit that Philistine right between the eyes. He sees Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in a fiery furnace and provides a fourth who protects them from the flames. With every test, God provides a way out. *"And God is faithful; he will not let you be tested beyond what you can bear. But when you are tested, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*(1 Cor 10:13).

And the God of Abraham and Isaac is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we have the ultimate provision. *"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?"*(Rom 8:32). God spared Isaac but He wouldn't spare His only Son, Jesus.

Jesus willingly took the wood and marched up the mount – not Moriah – but Golgotha. But there would be no substitute ram this time. Arrested, tried, sentenced, mocked, abandoned, beaten, crucified – but not for no purpose, not for defeat but for triumph in resurrection. God reversed the curse. Jesus lives and death has no dominion over Him – or us because we are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus lives to provide what we need when faced with life's tests. *"And my God will provide for all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."*(Phil 4:19). God brings laughter back to Abraham. Did you hear his joy, his laughter. He doesn't call his mountain Mt. Sacrifice, or Mt. Blood, Sweat, and Tears. Abraham calls the Mountain *"The LORD Provides!"* Where God guides, God provides! How do we know? We know Jesus. Jesus is the son of Abraham, the Son of sacrifice! Amen.