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Advent 2

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“Jesus is the Son of Abraham”

(Matthew 1:1)

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*(Based on a series written by Dr. Reed Lessing, Concordia
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*“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David,
the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

More attention has been given to Jesus; more devotion has been given to Jesus, more adoration and praise, and more opposition has been given to Jesus than any other person in the world – ever. Every recorded word that Jesus said has been sifted, analyzed, scrutinized, debated. His words have been studied more than the words of any king or queen, philosopher or scientist, or all those put together. No one would have anticipated that a man who lived in a remote, tiny, unimportant back water territory would become the one who would divide the centuries: BC – before Christ and AD, Anno Domini, the year of our Lord.

But just who is this person? Who is Jesus? That’s the question we’re asking this Advent. Who is Jesus? Matthew chapter one is our guide. “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1). Question: Who is Abraham’s famous son? That would be Isaac of course – the son of sacrifice. But Matthew says that would also be Jesus –also the Son of sacrifice.

You know Isaac’s story – it’s one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah had been trying to have children all their adult lives. Then at the ripe old age of one hundred for Abraham and ninety for Sarah, the son is born, the miracle son. His name is Isaac, which in Hebrew means “laughter”. Initially the promise of Isaac brought about the laughter of doubt, and then his birth brought about the laughter of great joy and praise! With one possible exception (that being the birth of Christ), there was never a birth more longed for and rejoiced in than Isaac’s.

But then the account of Isaac’s life takes a very serious turn. God commands Abraham to do the unthinkable. “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering.” No reasons are given. No

explanations offered. Even today, it's shocking to read these words in Genesis. The account of Isaac had an utterly delightful start, but just like that it becomes so dark and serious.

Whatever was God thinking? It's all so out of character. Hadn't he promised, after all, to make Abraham and Sarah's descendants into a great nation? How would he manage that if Isaac is no longer? Is God reneging on his promise? No explanations are given Abraham. God is asking Abraham to do nothing less than suppress his reason, and blindly obey and believe that somehow God will work something good out of all this nonsense.

It's interesting. The Bible doesn't even attempt to describe Abraham's anguish or agony over this command. Maybe that's best because his anguish is surely stronger than words can convey. But the Bible does give us plenty of details into the preparations that Abraham has to make, inviting us, in a way, to identify with and share Abraham's torture. For example, how he must have anguished as he gathered wood sufficient enough for this burnt offering. Luther speculates that Abraham didn't even have the heart to tell Sarah what he was up to. And how would he ever look her in the eyes again? We know Abraham doesn't have the heart to tell Isaac the purpose of the journey.

It's a three day trip to get to the region of Moriah. Seventy two hours to contemplate turning around and going back home. Seventy two hours to mull over the non-sense of it all. But Abraham stays the course. After what must have seemed the longest and the shortest three days in his life, Abraham, Isaac, two servants, and a donkey bearing a heavy load of wood arrive at the foot of Mt. Moriah.

Abraham tells the servants to stay behind with the donkey. He says they are going up to worship and "we" (meaning he and Isaac) shall return. He's not lying. He really means it. The book of Hebrews says that Abraham had concluded God could and would raise the dead. It's in this mind set, this faith that Abraham is able to go forward in obedience.

Isaac carries the wood now, while Abraham carries a knife and the fire, probably a container, like a censer filled with live coals. It's just the two of them now. Isaac asks, "My father, where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?" To hear those words, "My father" must have felt like a knife in the throat. Abraham chokes out: The Lord will provide."

By the time the wood was all laid out and ready to be lit, Isaac no longer has any doubts as to what lay in store for him. There's no record of him resisting being bound. Perhaps he decided that life didn't seem worth fighting for anymore. In any case, he is laid out on top of the wood like a lamb trussed for slaughter. Abraham's beloved Son, Sarah's laughter, the church's hope, the heir of promise, lies ready to die by his own father's hand. Shaking like a leaf, the old man got as far as raising the knife over his head, when at last God speaks up and says he'd seen all he needed to see. Abraham can use the knife on a ram caught in a bush, instead of on his son, bound to the wood. Again, no attempt is made at describing Abraham's relief. Words cannot suffice to describe the relief, the gratitude and the lingering confusion.

On the basis of this text some conclude God must be mean, manipulative and abusive. But in fact God is putting an end to human sacrifice which many of the neighboring nations still practiced. Remember also, God is not asking man to do for Him what He is not ready to do for man. The details in this story beg us to make the connection between what almost happened to Abraham's son, and what did happen to God's Son. Matthew wants us to make the connections by saying Jesus is the son of Abraham.

- Isaac was a long awaited son whose birth was the occasion of great celebration. Jesus was a long awaited only son whose birth was also the occasion of great celebration.
- Isaac's birth was miraculous as was the birth of Jesus.
- Isaac was the only son of Abraham whom Abraham loved. Jesus was the only son,

beloved of the Father.

- Isaac carried the wood on which he would be sacrificed. Jesus carried the wood on which he would be sacrificed.
- Isaac was bound to that wood. Jesus was bound to his.

There are some differences. Isaac experienced the wonder and joy of being saved by a substitute, a Lamb. For Jesus there is no substitute. He is the substitute. He is the Lamb of God. There are no interruptions at Calvary. No voice from heaven says, “Do not lay a hand on the lad.” Out of love for us, God the Father remains silent as he watches his Son die. Why? Because there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, blood of the Lamb of God. So Isaac was spared but Jesus was not.

Where the Lamb of God is, on the cross, our sins are there with him. He takes on our filth and stench as if they are his own. In effect, he says, “You are no longer a sinner, I am. I’m stepping into your place; I’m serving as your substitute. You have not sinned. I have. The whole world is in sin, but you are not in sin – I am. All your sins lie on Me, not on you.” He who knew no sin becomes sin. He’s not just pretending. No, on the cross he is chalk full of our sin. The devil, the great accuser, is always telling us, “You are a great sinner deserving of eternal condemnation”, and occasionally even the devil speaks the truth, and that is surely the truth about us. But Christ interrupts. “I will reverse that. I will be a sinner, you shall go free.” That’s grace.

When Isaac saw the wood and the fire, he wondered where the Lamb was and Abraham managed to say, “The Lord will provide.” The Lord has provided. First he provided a substitute for Isaac, a ram caught in the thicket. Then he provided a substitute for you. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is Jesus, the son of Abraham. Amen.

