

“Advent with Abraham, Part 3: The Welcome and the Wonder”  
Luke 2:4-12; Hebrews 12:28-13:2; Genesis 18:1-15

Yesterday some of us from along the Gold Coast sang Christmas carols and read the Bible for people at two different Altersheime. They welcomed us. We were their guests. But what were we actually doing there? We were hoping that *they* would experience God welcoming them into the mystery of his grace. We were their guest. We were welcomed. But we hoped that they would experience **an unexpected welcome**. That they'd sense the **wonder** of his love. That they'd be drawn into the **unending welcome** of eternal life with him.

In other words, we were kind of trying to recreate Genesis 18 for these older folks. Because that's exactly what we see in our passage today.

The unexpected welcome  
The urgency of wonder  
The unending welcome

Let's start with the unexpected welcome.

### 1. The Unexpected Welcome:

Let's say I'm sitting on my balcony. Suddenly there are three men standing nearby. I might say “Hey, what are you doing? Are you lost? Are you drunk?” I might call the police. I might just go inside and shut the curtains. I wouldn't do what Abraham does.

Abraham lived thousands of years ago in the Middle East. When he sees three strange adult men standing near his tent, the way he responds with extravagant hospitality. Abraham and Sarah rushed around to provide these 3 visitors (6-7) with fresh bread and meat, curds and milk. He stands there like a butler while they eat. It's 5-star hotel hospitality. To us, it is an **unexpected welcome**.

But actually, what he did was *completely normal*.

In the ancient world, you *have* to show hospitality to traveling strangers. The roles of host and guest were *vital* to the security, peace, and prosperity of the region.

## “Advent with Abraham, Part 3: The Welcome and the Wonder”

Luke 2:4-12; Hebrews 12:28-13:2; Genesis 18:1-15

So Abraham (2) rushes and bows to the ground in front of them. He (3) begs them to stay. He (4) offers some rest and water. Some (5) food. In that culture, Abraham and Sarah aren't offering an **unexpected welcome**.

But there *is* an **unexpected welcome**. Abraham and Sarah are being welcomed.

Yes, 3 men showed up. But verse 1 says, *the LORD* appeared to Abraham.

Abraham is the one welcoming 3 strangers, just as expected. But the real **unexpected welcome** is this: The LORD has appeared to Abraham! Yahweh has arrived at Sarah's home!

It's unexpected enough to have God show up and sit at your table. But then the **unexpected welcome** becomes even more surprising: These guests welcome Abraham and Sarah deeper into the wonder of God's love. Deeper into the LORD's promise to redeem and renew the whole world through this family. One of the guests says (10): “I'm coming back a year from now to meet your son.”

*Advent* is about us. It's about us welcoming the Lord Jesus as our guest. We welcome the Lord into our homes, into our church, into our hearts.

But Advent is even more about the Lord Jesus, coming to us, welcoming us again into *his* world, over which he has all authority in heaven and on earth. Welcoming us into his mysterious, loving, redeeming ways.

These men, or angels, or the LORD, or all three, show up unexpectedly to welcome Sarah and Abraham deeper into God's mystery. Centuries later, an angel shows up to Mary. An unexpected guest in Mary's home, in Mary's life. The angel gives Mary an **unexpected welcome** into the mystery of God-with-us, Emmanuel.

Advent with Abraham means that we welcome the LORD. And when we do, we discover the **unexpected welcome** is actually for us: God-with-us, Emmanuel, inviting us into his mysterious plans to bless and save and renew the world he so loves.

“Advent with Abraham, Part 3: The Welcome and the Wonder”  
Luke 2:4-12; Hebrews 12:28-13:2; Genesis 18:1-15

You’ll never experience God’s **unexpected welcome** if you’re not ready to welcome the LORD—like Abraham, like Mary—in your life. But as we welcome the LORD, we realize that he’s actually been welcoming us all this time. We are always *his* guests.

## 2. The Urgency of Wonder:

Advent with Abraham means **an unexpected welcome**.

But it also means **the urgency of wonder**.

In Chapter 17, God told Abraham that Sarah would conceive and have a son. God changed Abram’s name to Abraham. From Great Father to Father of a multitude. Now Abraham has to introduce himself to his neighbors as “Father of a multitude.” His neighbors know, of course, that he’s got one son, and that it’s actually his wife’s slave’s son. Kind of embarrassing for old man Abraham, right?

And what was Abraham’s response to this promise? He laughed. What was God’s response to Abraham’s laughter? God names their future son “Isaac”—“laughter.” “You can laugh, Abraham. But soon, I’ll be laughing when you name this kid (that you’re definitely going to have): “Laughter.”

God also changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, and said she’d be the *mother* of many nations. In our passage, the LORD shows up again, and says to Abraham, “in the next few months, your wife will conceive, and within a year, you’ll have your Laughter, your Isaac.” Sarah hears from inside the tent. She laughs (12). Verse 13: “Why did Sarah laugh?” Verse 15: “I didn’t laugh.” “Ha, nice try. You totally laughed.” And then the 3 visitors leave.

Abraham and Sarah laugh because of the impossibility of these promises. The LORD laughs back and says, (14) “Is anything too hard for me?”

It’s like the LORD, in these 3 visitors, is saying: “It’s wonderful how you’ve shown me this welcome. You ran around, doing your cultural duty. And you picked a delicious calf. The bread was fresh. The curds were delicious, and the milk was silky smooth.

“But now I want you to do something even more difficult. Something that will take even more concentration and effort. Something that you’re not going to learn from your

“Advent with Abraham, Part 3: The Welcome and the Wonder”  
Luke 2:4-12; Hebrews 12:28-13:2; Genesis 18:1-15

culture. Something that you can only learn by watching me. I want you to **wonder**. Abraham, this is the most important work you can do right now. Sarah, you have to walk with me. You two have to dedicate your lives to me. You have to lead a new family; a new nation. But you’re not going to be able to do any of this if you don’t learn to **wonder**.”

In all this laughter, it’s like Sarah and Abraham are saying, “LORD, I believe. Help my unbelief!” And it’s like the LORD is saying: “you want your unbelief helped? Do you want faith even when you’re full of doubts? Here’s what you do: **wonder**.”

Centuries later, something very similar happens. The LORD sends his angel to welcome Mary into his plans to save the world. The angel announces that conception is coming. That a baby is coming. The baby is going to have a specific name. And like Sarah, Mary has some questions: how is this going to happen!? The angel says that nothing can stand in the way of God’s promise.

We don’t know if Mary laughs. She must have laughed. She must have said “I believe; help my unbelief” at some point. But you know what she does? She **wonders**. In Luke’s gospel, Mary wonders, and wonders, and wonders. **Wonder** is just as urgent, just as important, for Mary as it is to be a good mom to this kid Jesus that’s coming soon.

“Mary: you want to welcome this unexpected guest, who will come into your own home, even into your own body? Then the most urgent thing for you is to **wonder**. To be amazed by it all.”

Folks, if Advent for Sarah and Abraham; and for Mary and Joseph, meant “I believe; help my unbelief!” If Advent for them meant the **urgency of wonder**, then Advent 2019 means that *you* need to prioritize a heart full of **wonder**.

Admit to the Lord that you believe, and that you still kind of think it’s all impossible. And then treasure up these stories in your heart until you can hear the Lord whispering to your heart: “Is anything too hard for the Lord? Can anything stand in the way of his word? Is anything too marvelous for God to promise? Can any of his words fail?”

“Advent with Abraham, Part 3: The Welcome and the Wonder”  
Luke 2:4-12; Hebrews 12:28-13:2; Genesis 18:1-15

You and I—if we are going to welcome the LORD into our homes and hearts, if we are going to experience the LORD’s welcome to us, if we are going to extend the LORD’s welcome to the nations through our slow, steady, faithful work and witness like Sarah and Abraham and Mary, we must **urgently wonder**.

As we extend the welcome of God to others, the work we must do with our hands, and the words we must speak with our mouths, must spring from hearts that are captured by the **wonder** of God’s stunning promises—promises that we believe are “yes and amen” in Jesus Christ, even though they feel too good to be true.

### 3. The Unending Welcome:

So if we are going to have Advent with Abraham, we need to experience God’s **unexpected welcome**, and we urgently need to grow in our **wonder**.

If we do, we’ll start to believe, and experience, and announce, and share **the unending welcome**. God’s **unending welcome**.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is the story of God’s hospitality: his **unexpected welcome** to us.

When Jewish people celebrate their Passover meals, they often leave one place at the table open—reserved for the guest who might show up, perhaps Elijah. Elijah’s coming would welcome God. God’s coming would mean a new world without evil and suffering—with never ending joy.

When my Christian friends celebrate the Passover Seder meal, they leave the seat empty, too—in hopes that Jesus will come again soon.

Jewish people raise a toast at the meal and say “Next year in Jerusalem.” My Christian friends raise a glass and say, hopefully, “Next year in the New Jerusalem.”

The hope of Advent is that God will show up. That he will welcome us. That we will have the chance to welcome him.

“Advent with Abraham, Part 3: The Welcome and the Wonder”  
Luke 2:4-12; Hebrews 12:28-13:2; Genesis 18:1-15

And if we have Advent hope — if we’ve experienced God’s **unexpected welcome** and if we have become people of **wonder**—then we will become welcoming people. We’ll welcome one another, our friends and neighbors, with the welcome of God. We’ll extend welcome after welcome—across cultural and linguistic differences.

Abraham welcomed guests. And then he realized *he* was the one being welcomed. Every one of us needs to realize this Advent, that as God calls us to be welcomers, he’s actually welcoming us into his presence, into his work, into the wonder of his redemption. Only this *wonder* can lead us to say “I am the Lord’s servant” and welcome people as we were meant to do.

You and I are welcomers, because we have been welcomed. What wonderful news! What a wonderful welcome. What a calling on our lives, on our families, on our church family!

In Jesus Christ, our welcome will never end. Let’s extend the welcome of God to the people that the Lord puts in our lives. Who knows— some of them might be angels. And Jesus says that if we welcome anyone in his name, we welcome *him*. With wonder in our hearts, with Jesus helping our unbelief, with the **unexpected welcome** of God making us laugh with joy and amazement—let’s be Advent-welcomers. We welcome, because he first welcomed us. How wonderful!