

# “Advent with Abraham, Part 4: The Son and the Sacrifice”

## Romans 8:31-39; Genesis 22:1-19

### Introduction

We’ve been meditating on the life of Abraham for several weeks now. It’s time for me to ask you: Would you like to be like Abraham?

It feels like we’re supposed to say “yes,” right?

But.

How many of you would rather have been born a couple thousand years before Christ instead of a couple thousand years after Christ? You’d rather live a semi-nomadic life in the ancient Near East than a settled life in the modern West?

Maybe you’d say “no, I don’t want all those inconveniences. What I want is Abraham’s faith!”

Really? Which of his acts of faith would you like to experience yourself? Leaving your homeland, your family, and your culture to go somewhere unknown? Having faith that God would give you a son in your nineties, and having year after year pass with no son? Trusting the Lord enough to circumcise yourself and all the males in your entire caravan? Or how about today’s test of Abraham’s faith: taking your promised son to a mountain where you’re supposed to sacrifice him as a burnt offering?

Anybody still want to have the faith of Abraham?

Some of us say “Yes!” With Soren Kierkegaard, we say, “Let’s leap into the dark. Let’s embrace with Abraham an irrational and absurd trust in God. Life without blind faith is no life at all.”

Some of us say “Calm down, preacher. I’m here for the Christmas carols, the Advent wreath and the candles, for the tree. If you are asking me for blind faith, I’ve come to the wrong church.”

Some of us say “Wait, I want to have faith like Abraham. I *think*. But I’m no Abraham. I’m just a normal person. I want to love the Lord, and serve the Lord. But it seems so radical to be like Abraham.”

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Want to be like Abraham? However you would answer that question, I want to convince you that to experience Advent with Abraham isn't so much about becoming a modern-day Abraham. Instead, it's three simple things:

Advent with Abraham is being

A child of Abraham

A child of God

A sibling of the Seed

So first, to experience Advent with Abraham means that you get to be “a child of Abraham.”

### **1. A child of Abraham**

You are not Abraham.

God didn't call you out of Ur. The Lord didn't promise you a son in your nineties. Yahweh didn't send priests and prophets and angels and visions and dreams to bless you and convince you of these promises. None of you is God's hand-picked father of many nations. None of you gets those privileges.

As my mom always said: “with great privilege comes great responsibility.”

None of you bears the responsibility of Abraham. None of you must leave your home and wander. None of you must circumcise a caravan of adults.

None of you have to experience the unique test that Abraham experienced. God does not ask you to offer your child on the altar to him.

Before we rush to try to make ourselves into modern-day Abrahams, we need to appreciate that we are *not* Abraham.

Are you okay with being a *child* of Abraham instead of being Abraham? Look at verse 17: Are you alright with the fact that you are one star in Abraham's sky. Is it enough to be one grain of sand on Abraham's seashore? Is it okay to be from *one* of the many nations that Abraham fathered by faith?

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Because you know what? Jesus was! Advent tells us that the God of gods was born into one family from one tribe in one little town in one tiny nation. In a very real sense, Jesus shows us what it’s like to be one of Abraham’s many sons. He grows up learning the stories of Abraham, growing in the faith of Abraham, embracing the promises made to Abraham, and—for many years, in humble and small ways—simply taking those promises into his daily life. Before Jesus began his messianic ministry, Jesus was a simple, faithful child of Abraham.

You’re one star in Abraham’s sky. But *you’re a star in Abraham’s sky!* God’s promises to Abraham have reached *you*. If you embrace those promises in simple faith: you’re a child of Abraham!

So Advent with Abraham means that you get the privilege of being a child of Abraham without the pressure to *be* Abraham. What a Christmas gift!

And secondly, Advent with Abraham means that you get to be a child of God by grace.

### **2. A child of God**

Look, the real reason we get nervous about the idea of having Abrahamic faith is this story we read today. It’s been called the best piece of literature to come out of the ancient world. But it’s one of the *hardest* texts in all the Bible.

How could God ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

Abraham watched God do stunning miracles in his life. He heard God make specific promises. Through *Isaac*, the LORD said, the blessing will come to many nations. And then Isaac comes, just like God said.

See, Abraham *knows* that Isaac is going to have children, and those children will have children. Whatever happens on that mountain, Abraham knows that Isaac is not a father yet, and he’s *going* to be a father.

So he can tell his servants, when he sees the mountain where he is supposed to take Isaac and sacrifice him: (5) “stay here. We’ll worship, and we’ll be back.” *We* will be back.

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And that’s why, when Isaac asks him (7) where the sacrifice is, Abraham can reply (8) that *God himself* will provide the lamb for the sacrifice.

The NT book of Hebrews (11:19) says that Abraham *reasoned* that God could raise Isaac back from the dead—either that or God would provide a lamb as a substitute. But either way, Abraham was going to get grandchildren through Isaac.

You see that? Abraham *reasoned*. He had *reasons* to trust God. It wasn’t blind faith. It wasn’t a leap in the dark. It wasn’t irrational. It was based on God’s meetings *with* Abraham and God’s miracles *for* Abraham.

“Abraham, do you believe that I am able to raise the dead? Do you believe that I will provide everything necessary for my promises to you to reach their fulfillment?”

“Yes.”

“Abraham,” (12) “now I know that you fear and love and trust me, because you haven’t tried to keep your son from me. You know that he was my gift. You love your son, but you won’t try to keep him for yourself. You’re giving your very self, your future, your legacy, your son, to me.”

You see? Your Father in heaven *did* provide the lamb for the sacrifice instead of Isaac!

And your Father in heaven did not withhold from *you his* son, his only son, whom he loved, but gave him up for us all! So that *you* could become not just a star in Abraham’s sky, but a *daughter or son of God himself*.

Like Abraham, *Jesus* trusted that God his Father could raise the dead. Jesus was ready to be a sacrifice for us because because he knew God would bring many sons and daughters to glory through him.

Advent with Abraham means not just becoming Abraham’s children. Advent with Abraham means becoming *Children of God* in the gift of Jesus Christ, provided, sacrificed, and resurrected, for us.

Then, lastly: Advent with Abraham means being a “sibling of the Seed”.

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### 3. A Sibling of the Seed

Is it fair for the oldest *son* to get the family’s inheritance?

In the ancient world, the rule was *primogeniture*. Almost everything that a father owned was given to the firstborn son. And that son was then responsible for taking care of the rest of the family through the inheritance he was given. Lots of privilege; lots of responsibility.

I need to say two things quickly about the Bible and the firstborn.

First, in the Bible, starting with the very first sons, God undermines primogeniture. The second son is preferred over the first. Or sometimes the *youngest* of many sons is preferred and chosen. Primogeniture might be the way the world does things. But God is up to something different.

Second, the firstborn belongs *to the LORD*. The first born animals were sacrificed, or redeemed by sacrificing a lamb instead. The firstfruits of the harvest belong to the Lord. The firstborn *sons* especially belong to the LORD. They must be redeemed through a sacrificial lamb.

What’s the point? God gives responsibility and privilege to younger siblings who don’t expect it. And God reminds his people of their sin and God’s grace by insisting that the firstborn belongs to him.

Jesus Christ is the only Son of the Heavenly Father. And he’s also the Seed of Abraham. The *beloved* Son of God; the chosen seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. The Son who *pleases* the Father. Jesus and the Father decided that Jesus would come and be the lamb of God. He’s the “firstborn” Son. But he doesn’t need saving. He doesn’t need redeeming. He’s never sinned.

But he comes to us.

Jesus goes up Mount Calvary, carrying the wood (like Isaac did) for his own sacrifice. He lays his own life down. He’s the lamb that God provides. He gives himself so that we are completely redeemed. And then Jesus takes his own life up again.

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Advent with Abraham means that we are siblings of the Seed; sisters and brothers of Jesus! Jesus takes all the responsibilities of the firstborn Son, gives himself completely to his God, and gives us all the privileges that were his alone: his Father’s inheritance—as if you and I were the firstborn sons.

### **Conclusion**

Is it irrational to follow Jesus?

Is it a leap into the dark to trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Paul says that when we look at Jesus, our Redeemer, our Lamb, (Rom 12), the only thing that makes sense is to offer our very selves, not as burnt offerings, but as living sacrifices. It’s our reasonable act of worship.

We haven’t had the unique experiences of Abraham. We haven’t been asked to do what Abraham did.

Instead: We get to be ... like the shepherds. The joy of the shepherds is: “It’s really true! I am one grain of sand on Abraham’s beach!”

We get to be ... like the wise sages from the east: The joy of the sages is: “It’s really true! We get to be three stars in Abraham’s vast sky!”

The joy of Advent for you and me is: “It’s really true: I am one daughter, one son: Of Abraham. Of God. I am one sister, one brother: Of Abraham’s Seed: Jesus.”

And ultimately, Advent with Abraham means that, in Jesus, the Son and the sacrifice, God has provided every reason for us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices—totally his, totally pleasing to him.

And when we offer ourselves up in faith, we have every reason to believe that he will raise us up on the last day to enjoy the blessing promised to Abraham’s children so long ago—and to enjoy it forever.