

4 March 2004  
Lent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

Shadows of our Saviour

“Isaac – The Death of the Promise?”

Text: Genesis 22:1-14; Luke 24:13-21a

God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. To kill him and offer him to God as a burnt offering. He didn't tell Abraham to have someone else do it – that would have been bad enough! No, God told Abraham to do it himself, with his own hand. *Father* Abraham would have to slay his own *son*, and then stand by and watch the fire do its work, as it consumed his son as a burnt offering to God. The pain that Abraham must have felt upon hearing those words is unimaginable.

But the pain that Abraham must have felt was not just at losing a son, but at losing this son. For Isaac was no ordinary child. He was, in fact, a miracle child. He was the son given to Abraham and Sarah by God Himself. The son who came after they were too old to have children. The son who carried, in his body, **God's promise** – that through Isaac and his descendants, would come the promised Saviour of the world. . . . But now God was telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. But to kill Isaac would be to kill the promise! This would be the death of not just a son, but of God's promise to Abraham. The death of God's promise of a Saviour. Had God changed His mind?

The two disciples who were walking on the road to Emmaus – as we heard in the Holy Gospel – were asking that same question. It was Sunday afternoon. That past Friday, Jesus had been killed. Crucified by the chief priests and the rulers of the people, together with the Romans. These two disciples had seen it. And as they walked on the road away from Jerusalem, you can hear the pain and disappointment and confusion in their words: **“We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”** They had hoped that Jesus was the one. They had put their faith and hope in Him and His promises to them. . . . But now they looked at the cross, and their hopes were dashed. They looked at the cross, and they saw the death not just of a man, of a son . . . but of the promise.

Now put these two stories together. These two stories of dashed hopes and seemingly broken promises. Look at the “shadow” – Isaac – and our Saviour together, and see not just how similar they are, but just what has really happened here. Isaac and Jesus. Two sons, **both** of whom are to be sacrificed. **Both** sons are gifts from God, children of promise, born miraculously. **Both** are dearly loved by their fathers. **Both** carry the wood

upon which they will be sacrificed. **Both** sacrifices will take place on mountains. **Both** go willingly, without argument or complaint. **Both** are bound, one probably with ropes, the other one with nails. And **both** are to die at the hand of their own father. . . . But then, abruptly, the parallels end, for while one sacrifice is stopped, the other is completed. Not to break God's promise, but to fulfill it. And the words that Abraham had spoken in faith, came true: "***God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.***" And He did. And as Abraham also said, "***On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.***" And it was.

And so Isaac, the "Shadow of our Saviour," teaches us something about the cross of Jesus and its significance for us. For like Isaac, **we** are the ones who should be on the altar. **We** are the ones who should be bound. **We** are the ones who should be killed and consumed by fire as a burnt offering, because of our sin. . . . But that sacrifice is stopped, because of the one that was completed! Because God provided the lamb for the burnt offering – His Son, to die in our place. God stopped Abraham's hand, but He did not stop His own hand. And the fire of the wrath of God against our sin is not poured out upon us, but instead poured out upon Jesus. "***O wondrous Love, what have You done? The Father offers up His Son!***" The hand of the Father finally came down upon His Son, and there, on the cross, consumed Him as the offering, as the sacrifice, in our place.

And you see how great is the wondrous love of your Heavenly Father for you, and the love of your brother and Saviour Jesus Christ for you – that He was willing to go under the hand of His Father, willing to lay on the altar of the cross, in your place. Knowing what was coming. Knowing the pain. Knowing the agony. Knowing that He would have to pay a price that we cannot even begin to imagine.

But after doing that for you, notice also the last similarity between Jesus and Isaac – the one we haven't yet mentioned. That both sacrifices took three days to complete, and after those three days, **both walked away from their altars alive!** Both walked away unbound and completely whole! Isaac because he was kept from death. Jesus because He defeated death in His resurrection! And so Jesus appeared to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and talked with them, and explained to them that this had to happen. He explained to them the Scriptures, including, no doubt, about Isaac and Himself. That God did not ever change His mind, but kept His promises to Abraham and Isaac. That God did not change His mind, but kept His promise to provide the Lamb as the sacrifice for our sin. That God does not change His mind, and will keep His promise of forgiveness and life to you and me. . . .

And that's important, because it's sometimes hard for us to believe; because we're kind of used to broken promises. We live in a world where "*promises are made to be broken.*"

This is a world where a person's promise doesn't mean much anymore. Where promises are now considered mostly as a means to an end. . . . But not for God! Even though it meant the life of His Son, He kept His promise to you and me to provide the sacrifice and forgiveness for our sin. And so, like Isaac, we will walk away from our Lord's altar tonight – not slain, but forgiven. Our bondage broken. For God is faithful. The Lord has provided!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sermon Hymn: The Word of God, From Days of Old  
Tune: Rockingham Old (HS #853)

1. Isaac

The Word of God, from days of old  
The story of our Saviour told;  
That in our sin and misery  
Our hope and life our faith might see.

For Judah's lion wins the strife  
And reigns o'er death to give us life.  
For as God promised Abraham,  
In love, He would provide the Lamb.

And so on wood two sons were laid,  
The one was spared, the other paid;  
No blood of Isaac would be shed,  
God's only Son would die instead.

The promise God, to Abram, gave,  
That from his seed, all He would save,  
God did fulfill – when died His Son  
And we from sin and death were won.

To Thee, eternal Three in One,  
Let homage meet by all be done  
Whom by the cross Thou dost restore,  
Preserve, and govern evermore.

