

8 March 2006
Lent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Abraham’s Exodus Before the Exodus”

How often do we go the wrong way? In our lives, in our thinking, in our faith? Going from good to bad, getting lost in our worry and anxiety, doubting and trusting in the wrong things? How often do we find ourselves going the wrong way?

Well, we’re not the only ones! Tonight we heard that Abraham’s **going the wrong way!** He’s heading down to Egypt. But Canaan, the land of the Jordan, the Holy Land, is his to have by divine decree! Why would he leave the land God promised him, to go to the land of pagan pyramids? Well, he thinks as we think, I guess. A man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do. He has hungry mouths to feed – his own, Sarah’s, and plenty of others. So with famine devouring the land of Canaan, he sets his sights on the lush fields of Egypt.

And then when he gets there, he **goes the wrong way again**, doesn’t he? He hatches a plan for survival, and reveals it to his beautiful Sarah. *Tell these foreigners you’re my sister, or I might find my head at the wrong end of a rope!* Why does he try to pull the wool over Egyptian eyes? Shouldn’t he have just kept his mouth shut, or revealed the truth, and suffered the consequences? Is he acting from faith? Maybe so, maybe no. Where are you going, Abraham?

But it’s not just Abraham – there goes Pharaoh, wasting no time to whisk beautiful Sarah into his royal harem. Abusing his power. Amusing his lust. And **he’s going the wrong way**, isn’t he? . . . He most certainly is, as he is soon to find out. For he’s nabbed no ordinary lady, no Jane Doe, but the patriarch’s wife – from whose womb is to issue forth the promised seed, Isaac. Unbeknownst to him, Egypt’s king has just stirred up a heavenly hornet’s nest!

And so into the midst of all this going the **wrong way**, steps the God of the **right way**. So first there come the plagues, crashing into Pharaoh’s house, causing who-knows-what to happen. Whatever it was, it wasn’t pretty. This Pharaoh learns much faster than one who would come later, and escorts Sarah back to Abraham, though quite incensed at Abraham for hiding that fact that *Miss Sarah* was actually a *Mrs!* . . . And now Abraham is sent back the *right way*: **“Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go!”** But he doesn’t leave empty-

handed. For Sarah's sake, the king had opened wide his wallet, giving Abraham sheep, oxen, donkeys, servants, and camels. And thus protected by grace, enriched by Egypt, and blessed by God, father Abraham heads in the *right* direction, home to the Promised Land, *where God has left the light on for him!*

It's amazing, isn't it? But most amazing of all is that all these things happened and were written down *not* just as interesting stories or history, *but for your sake*, upon whom the end of the ages has come. For the truth is that Abraham's story is Israel's story; and Israel's story is the story of Jesus; and the story of Jesus is *your* story – the story of *your* exile and return to the God of salvation. The story of the God of the right way working in your wrong way hearts and lives.

For what happened to father Abraham happened because of his sons, yet to be born. *To give them hope*. For not three generations would pass before grandson Jacob and great-grandsons Joseph and his 11 brothers would all wind up back in Egypt because of a famine. They too, in time, would get in hot water with the Pharaoh. So what would God do? *You already know!* He crashes Pharaoh's party with plagues – ten of them this time. The king would finally knuckle under and let Abraham's children go, but again, not before Egyptians wallets had been emptied, giving Israel their well-deserved back pay for years of work and sweat and slavery. And so there goes Israel, in the *right* direction – protected by grace, enriched by Egypt, and blessed by God – finally homeward bound, *where God had still left the light on for them!* Second verse, same as the first.

But this song doesn't just have two verses, but many, for the path of Abraham and the path of Israel is the path upon which we now walk. Often walking the wrong way. Walking down into our own Egypts. Looking for help, for success, for solutions, for security, for *life*, in the wrong places. Where it cannot be found. And it is a hard habit to break. Indeed, one that we will never be free of as long as we live in this flesh. For Egypt is not just out there, but in here. In our hearts. The inbred sin that leads us back down the well-worn path to where we think we want to be. And the prince of this world loves to lead us there – to the land of sin, of forbidden pleasures, into servitude to lust, greed, power, wealth, whatever poisonous weeds grow so well in our Egypts. So **repent**. Come home. *For God has left the light of His grace on for you*, shining in the face of the One who is Light of Light.

For Abraham's story is Israel's story; and Israel's story is the story of Jesus; and the story of Jesus is the story of *your* salvation – the story of the God of the right way working in your wrong way hearts and lives. For God protected Sarah's womb from Pharaoh so that, in the end, Jesus might be born for you. For from Abraham's seed came Isaac through the womb

of Sarah; from Isaac's seed came Jacob through the womb of Rebekah; from Jacob's seed came Judah through the womb of Leah; and down through the years the line continued until finally from no man's seed, but conceived by the Holy Spirit, the Promised Seed Himself came through the womb of the virgin. Come **for you**, to make you sons and daughters of Abraham, by faith.

For you see, there goes Jesus – *going the right way!* – coming down from Heaven into our Egypt of sin and death, to redeem you and make you His own. And not only you, but Abraham and Sarah, Mary and Joseph, yes, even Pharaoh and his concubines – all of *them* and all of *you*. For He comes and goes head-to-head with sin, death, and hell itself, and wins by losing, lives by dying, saving you by letting Himself be damned. The world says: *That's the wrong way!* But for the God of salvation, it is the right way. And so for all the Israelite babies thrown into the Nile, to all the unborn today murdered in the womb – Jesus is born and dies. For all the women forced into harems, to all those today who *willingly* defile their bodies – Jesus is born and dies. For all the men who betray their wives, to all those today who fantasize about doing so – Jesus is born and dies. For one and all, rich and poor, black and white – Jesus is born and dies. He is born in our Egypts, suffers the plagues and curse to fall upon Him, and then in His resurrection, smashes the chains that bind you, and sets you free!

And you are free! You are redeemed! No longer an alien and exile from the Promised Land, but a citizen by grace, by the One who procured your citizenship not by opening up His wallet of silver and gold, but by opening up His side of water and blood. And He has led you forth from your place of captivity and death through that water in the Font, and has filled and fed you with that body and blood at His Table. And all of us wrong way Christians, our right way Father calls home. *He has left the light on **for you*** – the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The light of forgiveness. The light of grace. All of *our* verses, the same as the first. That with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the saints, *we too* might hear those wonderful words: welcome home, child. Welcome home.

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