

# **"The Patriarchs Promised"**

## **Advent Sunday, 29th November 2009**

**Rev Brian Senior**

### **Readings:**

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Luke 21:25-36

### **Sermon**

We're going to start today with a bit of a puzzle – we've decided that each of the four Sundays in advent we're going to have a Memory Verse to learn and remember ... to help us think about the real meaning of Advent.

Our first Memory Verse comes from the book of Genesis.

*Recruit volunteers from Uniformed Groups.*

*Give out phrases on card from today's 'Memory Verse', and see if you can sort them into the right order. Adults can help by looking up the verse and giving advice.*

Phrases:            I will make you into  
                         a great nation  
                         and I will bless you;  
                         I will make your name great,  
                         and you will be a blessing.  
                         I will bless those who bless you,  
                         and whoever curses you I will curse;  
                         and all the peoples of the earth  
                         will be blessed through you.  
                         (Genesis 12:2-3)

*Read it through a few times together (whole congregation) and then with some phrases removed (turned around) ... you'll get a bookmark on the way out, so that you can take it home and remember it.*

This was the promise God first gave to Abram ... whose name was later changed to Abraham ... when God called him to leave country, his home and his family and set out for the Promised Land. God led him to the place which we now call The Holy Land ... Israel and the Palestinian Territories ... to begin a new life there.

Abram was the first of the Patriarchs.

Remember when we lit our first Advent Candle at the beginning of the service; we did it to remember the Patriarchs ... the fathers of the people of Israel who led the nation to follow God. These were the heroes of the Old Testament - men such as Isaac, Moses and David. They responded to God's call, and set out on the adventure of leading God's people.

God made this promise to Abram ... a promise to make him into a great nation and bless him, so that through him God could bless every nation upon the earth. Abram trusted God,

and God blessed him and made him the father of Isaac, who became the father of Jacob ... and so on down the generations to Jesus himself.

God made a promise to Abram, and Abram chose to trust God and to serve him. Just as Abram received the promises of God, so he also became the messenger of promise ... because what God promised him also applies to us:

*"I will bless you ... I will make you a blessing ... and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you."*

So through the ups and downs of national life ... through famine in Canaan, through four hundred years of captivity in Egypt, through forty years of wandering in the desert, and through coming into the Promised Land ... the Patriarchs each received the promises of the One True God, and became messengers of the promise.

Each of these men looked forward to the time when God would save them from their enemies and make them into a great nation ... but although God blessed them in many ways, they never saw the promise fulfilled.

The prophet Jeremiah, in our first reading, was also a messenger of the promise:

*"The days are coming' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfil the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah'"*

... and he writes about *"a righteous branch from David's line who will save the people ... 'The Lord our Righteousness'."* Since Jeremiah was a prophet, God showed him that the time would come when a different kind of leader would do what is just and right.

Who do you think he Jeremiah is writing about? *Jesus.*

All through the Old Testament, the people were looking forward to the coming of the Saviour, and although they didn't really understand what this Saviour would do, they believed that he was their only real hope.

And then Jesus came ... and Jesus taught the people that God loves them, even though they are undeserving, and he proved it by healing their sicknesses and caring for their needs. Jesus showed people how God wants them to live, and taught them what it means to serve God ... and then he died on the cross to take the punishment for all their sins ... and God raised him back to life again.

But Jesus also told us about the future, and what was going to happen at the end of the age, when he will return in all his glory to establish his rule on the earth. That is what our gospel reading for today is all about. It is not an easy passage, and we may find some of it disturbing, but it gives us a real reason to hope for the future.

Jesus talked about the difficult times which were to come ... times when terrible things would happen in the world, and people would be frightened. Jesus told us that there would be wars and famines, fires and floods ... man-made terrors and natural disasters – and, of course, there are.

Some of them have already happened, some of them are still to come, and some of them are happening now. But Jesus taught us to see all these things as signs of his coming.

But look at verses 27 and 28:

*“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

Jesus is coming back! This is the good news of Advent, and we are the messengers of the promise. However many bad things may be happening in the world, one day Jesus is coming to make all things new ... and we have a choice to either accept him or reject him as our Lord and Saviour. Those who believe and trust in him will live with him forever.

Most people think of Advent as not much more than a countdown to Christmas – they open their Advent Candles and eat their chocolates, and panic about how many shopping days are left, and whether they can send the Christmas cards on time - but it is amazing how many people don't really know what Christmas is all about, let alone Advent.

You may remember that last January there were atheist adverts on London buses saying:

“There's probably no God.”

... and there have been incidents over the last few years of firms banning employees from giving each other Christmas cards, and councils trying to re-name Christmas as 'Winterval' to avoid upsetting unbelievers, or people of other faiths. But Muslims and Jews and Hindus don't want us to abandon Christmas. Recent research revealed that 85% of people agree that 'Christmas should be called Christmas because we are still a Christian country.'

That seems really encouraging ... but sadly research also shows that people don't know what Christmas really is. Only 12% of adults know the facts of the Christmas story in any detail ... and the figure drops to just 7% amongst 18-24 year olds.

So, if we are messengers of the promise then we need to keep telling the story of Jesus' birth in every way we can. There is a new poster campaign this year which shows a traditional nativity scene, but set in a bus shelter – the modern day equivalent of a stable.  
[OHT]

People need to know that Jesus was born at Bethlehem to be the Saviour of the World ... and to be their Saviour. At the same time, people also need to know that Jesus is coming back to be their judge.

Jesus called the Church into being to tell them.

That is what the Church is here for ... and by the Church, of course, I mean US – all of us, sharing together in telling others the truth about Jesus ... being a blessing and bringing hope.

So, as we begin Advent once again ... and as we light our Christingles to remember how Jesus came to be the light of the world, and to shed his blood on the cross for us ... let us

also pray that God will strengthen us to be messengers of the promise that Jesus is coming back as Judge and Lord and King ... and that he is coming to save us!

*Now ... let's rehearse our Memory Verse!*

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a great nation  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
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(Genesis 12:2-3)