

BIBLE STORY: THE THREE VISITORS

Genesis 18:1-15

Central Thoughts

- The Holy Trinity appeared to Abraham announcing the fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham to give him a son.
- The son of the promise born to Abraham and Sarah points forward to the final Son of the Promise, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the blessing of salvation would come to all the families of the earth.
- Abraham's and Sarah's inability to conceive children and their advanced age at the time the Lord fulfilled His promise teaches us that salvation depends entirely upon God's promise and not our works or ability.
- The account of the Three Visitors illustrates the confession of the Creed that there is one God in three persons, that we are named the children of the Holy Trinity in our Baptism, and that we give thanks (eucharist) to the Holy Trinity for His salvation to us in Christ in the Lord's Supper.

Discussion Questions

How did the Lord appear to Abraham by the terebinth trees of Mamre?

He appeared to him in the form of three visitors.

What does the sign of the three visitors reinforce to us about the Lord's identity?

The Lord who had called Abraham to faith and had given Him the promise of the Seed through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed was the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

How do we know that Abraham believed that the three visitors were the Lord God?

He ran from the tent door to meet them, bowed before them and addressed them, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant..."

What is the Lord's favor?

His grace, His undeserved love.

What does the offer of foot-washing by Abraham signify?

It is an act of worship that signifies that the Lord is Abraham's Redeemer. (See the theology of the Seed of the Woman from Genesis 3:15, who crushes the Serpent's head with His heel).

What is the feast that Abraham and Sarah prepared for the three visitors?

It was a feast of thanksgiving (or eucharist, which means thanksgiving) for the Lord's undeserved grace and lovingkindness to Abraham and Sarah in the covenant God made with Abraham.

Why did the Lord call for Sarah?

To confirm before her and Abraham that, according to the time of life, the Lord would return to them so that Sarah would have the son of the promise.

What does the expression "according to the time of life" mean?

It means that Abraham would impregnate Sarah, she would conceive a son from Abraham's seed, and after nine months, when she was 90 years old, the son would be born.

What was Sarah's response to the Lord announcing to them that the long-awaited son would finally be born?

She laughed because she would be 90 years old when their son is born. It was utterly unthinkable to her that she would have pleasure with her husband, conceive, and give birth at her age.

Is anything too hard for the Lord?

No, with God all things are possible.

What does the name Isaac mean?

Laughter

What did Sarah not want to admit?

That she had, indeed, laughed at God's announcement that she would finally give birth to the son of the promise.

What does God's faithfulness to Abraham and Sarah teach us?

That He will keep His promises to us in Christ, despite our doubts, fears, and wavering faith; and that the Lord's salvation is based entirely upon Christ and His promises to us and not upon our own works or merits.

Meditation on the Bible Story

The only true and living God is the Holy Trinity who appeared to Abraham and Sarah as the three visitors at the terebinth trees of Mamre. The Lord confirmed to Abraham and Sarah that His promise of a son would finally be fulfilled. Throughout the 25 years of their lives together since the Lord called them to faith by His promise, they learned the futility of relying upon themselves or of trying to "help God" keep His promise. Salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace. We cannot help Him fulfill His Word. Faith is the passive trust of the heart that simply receives His Word and believes it. Even this faith is a miracle of God's grace, created by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of the Gospel. In the account of the three visitors, we see a manifestation of the Creed that there is one God in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Lord our God is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. By the Word of the Gospel, He calls us to faith, and by the Word of the Gospel He gives us the salvation that the Son of God (the ultimate Son of the Promise) has earned for us in His death upon the cross. In the account of the three visitors we see an illustration of the divine name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in which we are baptized. In the feast that Abraham and Sarah prepare for the three visitors, we see how the Lord's Supper is not only a supper of salvation for us in the body and blood of Christ, but that it is also a Eucharist (a "thanksgiving") for all the blessings of salvation that Christ has won for us upon the cross and distributes to us in the Lord's Supper. As Abraham and Sarah learned total dependence upon the Lord's promise, so the Lord teaches us to rely upon the promises of the Gospel alone for our salvation.

Prayer on the Bible Story

O Blessed Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as You were faithful to the covenant You made to Abraham and Sarah, so teach us to believe that You are faithful to us and to the promises of our baptism to forgive our sin, to rescue us from death and the devil, and to give us the gift of eternal salvation. Grant us faith to trust in Your promises above all things; for You live and reign, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



The Three Visitors
Genesis 18:1-15