

“Be Born in Us today: Bringing Blessing”

Genesis 12: 1-8

1 The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. 2 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. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Harran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired at Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

Luke 1: 39-56

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!”

46 And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as He promised our ancestors.”

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Theme Verse – Concentrating on Genesis 12:2 “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

Imagine that two friends of yours are attending a Packers Game at Lambeau Field. The game is televised, and you have the game on at home. You know your friends are there in person, and wonder if by chance you might spot them somewhere near the fifty yard line in the crowd of 60,000. What are the odds? Then suddenly there they are! A camera pans across the crowd and settles on them long enough that you recognize them. It is an amazing moment. You shout out their names as if they can hear you. What are the odds?

It's easy to get lost in a crowd. As in the old *Where's Waldo?* books, it can be hard to find the one among the many. In the holy history of God and humanity known as the Bible, God is more than pretty good at finding someone in a crowd. Four millennia ago God found a tribal chief named Abram from among all the nations and people groups on earth. God singled this leader out of the crowd and promised to bless him. Such a blessing God gave Abram that it would extend to all nations. That's what God said, and that's exactly what happened. [NOTE 1]

Some see this idea of Abraham blessing the nations as fulfilled in his impact on the world's religions. The three great world religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all called “Abrahamic religions,” each recognizing Abraham in some way as significant in its history and tradition.

For us Christians, Abraham's impact goes much farther than that of an historical or religious figure. We believe that God blessed Abraham to establish the nation Israel and that from that nation God blessed the world with the Messiah, Jesus Christ. We believe that when God first blessed Abraham, God already had the idea of blessing the whole world in mind. You can't miss this in the promise God gives Abraham. It is all very personal, this call of God. At the same time, it is all very universal, the one and the many. God says, “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). [NOTE 2]

We live among the many. We are defined by the communities we cherish, the relationships we hold dear, the culture that shapes us. More and more, we think globally. We care what happens on the other side of the world. In so many ways we can lose ourselves in our culture. Almost a century ago already, Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* was prophetic in recognizing how the one can get lost in the many. Wilder has one of his characters, Rebecca, recall a letter her friend Jane had received. It was addressed to “Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God.” You can picture Jane Crofut in that address becoming smaller and smaller, less and less significant.

This can be a blessing, this strong sense of the many, especially when it leads us, as in the case of the letter in *Our Town*, back to the One who has created it all, all of this community and culture of which we are a part, From the individual we move to the universe and ultimately to the Creator God. The challenge, though, is not to lose oneself along the way. The challenge is to know that as God is busy working the divine plan to save the world through Jesus Christ, God has not lost sight of you in the global crowd. “For God so loved the world” is true, but just as true is “God so loved you.” God has some work to do, cutting through all that is between me and God—the stuff of families, nations and cultures—but God gets the divine mail delivered to Jane and to you.

[NOTE 3]

That is the message of the call of Abraham. Yes, God is out to save the many, even the “all,” but God does it one by one, family by family, nation by nation. And when God gets through, when the saving work of Jesus Christ takes hold of an individual, it is simply true that community is born. This new community is, of course, with God, with the church, and with the neighbor, all objects of the individual’s Christian love. In other words, from the many God finds the one who in turn blesses the many. That is your story of blessing and mine.

A favorite painting of many at Christmas is Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel’s *The Census of Bethlehem*, painted in 1566. Bruegel places the story of Christmas Eve in his own contemporary setting of a taxing census in a bustling peasant village in the Low Countries of the Netherlands. There is enough to see in the painting to fill half an hour— ice skaters, snowball fights, kids sledding across the ice, the draining of a slaughtered pig’s blood for sausage, a makeshift pub, a crumbling castle, a well-kept church and a long line of taxpayers. You have to look for her, but there in the foreground, among the bustling crowd of a Renaissance Christmas Eve, is Mary, the expectant mother of our Lord. She rides a donkey led by Joseph into Bethlehem. A cow beside her looks to the viewer as if to say, “Please, take note. He has arrived.” The one among many, blessed to bless many! “Blessed among women are you” (Luke 1:42).

[NOTE 4] Marked by a fresh candle each week, we begin today a journey. We begin a season celebrating the birth of the One who came to save the many. This is the first week of Advent. This season, these next four weeks should get us ready, help us to celebrate, and glorify and magnify the coming birth of Jesus Christ, God become man, here on earth and all that it has changed, transformed and renewed.

In a sermon for Christmas Day, Martin Luther said, “The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own?” (“Sermon for Christmas Day; Luke 2:1-14,” *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, Lutherans in All Lands Press, 1906).

Much of this season will be spent doing what we do at Christmas with the people we love the most. The season of lights and carols and greens and cookies and gifts will in many ways bring its own blessings to our lives and, yes, to our culture. It will be a

*Invite to devotionals
something different to
make this
4 weeks stand
out.*

lovelier time when the world takes on a yuletide glow, and the message of peace on earth, goodwill toward all seems more than just a slogan. We will do it all with millions of Christians across the world, and that will be good.

[NOTE 5] That said, the good news of Christmas is also meant to be ours, one by one. God has always had a heart for the one through whom many will be blessed. So it was with Abraham. So it was with Mary. So it was with Jesus of Nazareth, and so it is with you. Christ was born for us. Christ was born for you. This Christmas may God find and bless you among the many and make you a blessing.

This is one of those things that can easily get lost in the crowd of other great things that happen in and around Christmas. But please take a minute, pause, and contemplate what it means that “Christ was born for you!” It is one of those phrases like “you are fully adopted as God’s child” that is truly amazing. Yes God so loved the world. But He also loves you, Christ was born for you! If that doesn’t make you feel special nothing will. God knows you personally, He knows your name, and He sent His Son to be born on earth for You, to die for your sin.

The last stanza of Phillips Brooks’ carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” closes with a prayer. May it be our prayer, one and all: “O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel! Emmanuel means God with us. Now that’s something to celebrate!

What are you going to do about it? How might the idea that Christ was born for you change how you live in the next week? Please, take a moment and write out an “I will ... statement” before you leave. Mine is this, “I will take time, yes make time, to pause and think about how awesome it is that God sent Jesus to be born for me. I will think about how I might live like I was God’s kid each morning this week. How can I be a blessing to someone today?”

Let’s pray ... Amen.

Sermon Notes for “Be Born in Us Today: Bringing Blessing” based on Genesis 12:2
Given at Doster Community Church on November 27, 2022

- I. It is so amazing that God, the Creator, the all-knowing, everywhere present, all-powerful, God chooses to deal with the individual ... with you!
- II. God chooses the one to bless the many. God chose Abram, changed him into Abraham, and blessed the World through him.
- III. Yes, God is out to save the world, the “All” but God does it one by one, family by family, nation by nation. When God gets through, when the saving work of Jesus Christ takes hold of an individual, community is born.
- IV. Jesus Christ was The One among many, blessed to bless many! Mary was the one, “Blessed among women are you” (Luke 1:42) and she was a blessing to many.
- V. God has always had a heart for the one through whom many will be blessed. So it was with Abraham. So it was with Mary. So it was with Jesus of Nazareth, and so it is with you.
- VI. Now take a minute and think about how God can be a blessing to many through you? What are you going to do about it? Please write an “I will ... statement” before you leave church.