

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY
5 March 2023 - Second Sunday in Lent

HYMNS: 456 385 413 69 840 279

INTROIT: Psalm 121

I shall lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD, who has made heaven and earth.
May He not allow your foot to slip! Let Him who keeps you not fall asleep!
Indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither fall asleep nor slumber.
The LORD is your Keeper. The LORD is your Shade on your right hand.
The sun will not strike you by day or the moon by night.
The LORD will protect you from all harm. He will protect your life.
The LORD will keep you as you go out and come in, both now and for ever.

COLLECT: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength.
By Your mighty power, defend us from all adversities that may happen
to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul;
through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS:

Genesis 12:1-9 Through you all will be blessed.

Romans 4:1-8, 13-17 Faith is credited as righteousness.

John 3:1-17 The new birth

Welcome to all worshipping with us today!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaelc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

The Lord's Supper has always been seen as a sign of unity between those who commune together at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10:17). When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper in a church body that has a confession of faith, they thereby declare that they believe that they are one in faith with those who commune with them. Since people cannot honestly hold two differing confessions at the same time, they cannot honestly commune with those whose confession is in conflict with their own. If any do this nevertheless, they deny their own confession, and so deny Christ Himself (2 Cor. 6:14-18). **We ask visitors who are communicant members in a church not in fellowship with the AELC, or are not familiar with the AELC Statement of Faith, to refrain from communing today. If you have questions, please speak with the pastor after service.**

Genesis 12:1-9

¹ The LORD had told Abram: **“Leave your land, your relatives and your father’s family and go to the land that I shall show you!** ² I shall make you into a great nation. I shall bless you. I shall make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse him who curses you and **in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”**

⁴ Therefore, Abram left, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when **he left** Haran. ⁵ Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother’s son Lot and all the possessions that they had accumulated, as well as the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram travelled through the land to the place at Shechem, to the large tree of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, **“I shall give this land to your offspring.”**

Therefore, he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ He moved on from there to the hill-country east of Bethel and put up 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. ⁹ Then Abram broke camp and continued to move on toward the Negev.

Romans 4:1-8, 13-17

¹ Therefore, what shall we say that Abraham, the ancestor of our race, has found? ² For, if Abraham was justified by works, he had something about which to boast. However, he could not boast before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? **“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”**

⁴ When a person works, his wages are not credited as grace but as a debt. ⁵ However, to the person who, instead of working, believes in God, who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ In the same way, David also speaks about the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered!** ⁸ **Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will certainly not credit his sin!”** ...

¹³ It was not through the Law that Abraham or his descendants received the promise that he would be the heir of the world but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For, if those who belong to the Law are the heirs, then faith has been made worthless, and the promise has been made ineffective. ¹⁵ For the Law

works God's anger, and where there is no Law there is no transgression either.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise belongs to faith, that it may be according to grace, that the promise may be sure to all Abraham's descendants, not only to those who belong to the Law but also to those who belong to the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as the Scriptures have said, **"I have made you the father of many nations."** He is our father in the presence of God, in whom he believed, the God who makes the dead live and calls what does not exist into existence.

John 3:1-17

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher. For no one can do these miraculous signs, which You are doing, unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴ Nicodemus asked Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ What has been born of the sinful human nature is sinful human nature, but what has been born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I have told you, 'You people must be born from above!' ⁸ The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it is coming from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who has been born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus answered Him, "How can these things be?"

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel without knowing these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I tell you, We speak what We know and testify to what We have seen, and you people do not accept Our testimony. ¹² If I have told you people earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has gone up into heaven except the One who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ As Moses **lifted up the snake** in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world may be saved through Him.

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Lent, 2023
Genesis 12:1-3

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the first 3 verses of our First Reading from before, Genesis 12:1-3: **The LORD had told Abram: “Leave your land, your relatives and your father’s family and go to the land that I shall show you! ² I shall make you into a great nation. I shall bless you. I shall make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse him who curses you and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Set before us today is the beginning of one of the most remarkable narratives in history. It is simple and yet profound. Out of all humanity, God chose one man and set Him on a course of blessing, adventure, and faith that still reverberates throughout our time. It is a story of faith and remarkable blessings, but most of all, it is the story of grace. It reflects and teaches the nature and workings of the grace of God and shows how we are blessed to be a blessing.

Out of all men alive, God chose Abraham to receive the great blessings announced in our text. He would be the father of the line from which the salvation of all men and women would come. We hear that blessing in these words, **“I shall make you into a great nation. I shall bless you. I shall make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse him who curses you and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”**

A blessing for all the earth would come through Abraham - a blessing to be understood throughout history as the one promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden. It is in Jesus Christ that we all are blessed. He was born of the line of Abraham and was the substance of the blessing Abraham received that day. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing!

Of course, Abraham received much more in that blessing than just the family

line. At that time, Abraham was named Abram and was one of three sons. By the age of 75, his wife had proven to be barren. He was childless, an odd predicament for a man whose name had meant “*exalted father*.” Abram was without a child or heir, and in that culture and that day, being without a child was considered a curse and something one wanted to avoid.

Suddenly, at the age of 75, shortly, it appears after his father passes away, God speaks to Abram. We don’t know if Abram knew God or worshipped Him. People make assumptions, and they may be valid, but maybe not. The Bible doesn’t say. But what it does tell us is that the LORD told Abram - somehow - to **“Leave your land, your relatives and your father’s family and go to the land that I shall show you!”**

The promise to Abram was that once he had gone as the LORD had instructed him, He would make Abram a great nation, which was the promise of children to carry on his name. A great nation means many, many descendants. The LORD’s promise was precious to a man seemingly cursed to be without an heir. The LORD also promised to bless him, which I would guess Abram would consider prosperity, if not riches. He was clearly offered some sort of fame or a lasting legacy that would make his name familiar to many and make him revered as a great man.

Abram was also offered divine protection. The LORD said, **“I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse him who curses you.”**

Abram’s friends are the LORD’s friends, and He will bless them, and those who would set themselves against Abram would have the LORD as their adversary, and He would curse them. This is the sort of protection that one can only dream of! The blessing works in several ways. First, it comforts Abram. Second, it is a warning for anyone familiar with the LORD’s promise not to be guided by superstitious thoughts, as many were in those days. Third, anyone who befriended Abram was bound to notice their blessedness for doing so. Conversely, those who took action against Abram would find their fortunes diminished, as did Pharaoh a few verses later in Genesis 12 when he was afflicted with great plagues for taking Abram’s wife Sarai as his own.¹ Finally, anyone who observed the life of Abram would find the pattern and be warned.

The element of the blessing, which suggests that Abram knew the history of

¹ Genesis 12:10-20

humanity and the promise of God for a Saviour from sin, is the last part of the blessing. The LORD said, **“In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”**

Judging from the Biblical lineages, Shem, the son of Noah, who was in the ark with his father after his one-hundredth birthday, was still alive, and it is possible that Abram knew Shem. In fact, judging from the Biblical chronology, Shem appears to have outlived Abram by about seventy-five years. Therefore, it is quite possible that Abram knew the promise of God to Adam and Eve and would have understood clearly that this was a promise to him that the Saviour of all mankind would come from among his descendants.

However, the best things about this passage are none of the facts we just discussed. They were the best parts for Abram and possibly his children, but not so much for us. Two things stand out as really exciting in this passage.

First, the LORD made a promise here that we can recognise as being fulfilled much later. While some parts of the promise were fulfilled in Abram’s life, the promise of the Messiah was fulfilled nearly two millennia later. When the LORD promises, it is absolutely sure.

That is important because the LORD has made precious promises to us, which are connected to the promise to Abram. Our promise is salvation. That includes forgiveness of sins, but even more, *it is the promise of the resurrection from our graves and of life everlasting in glory with our Lord!* It is wonderful and reassuring to know that these promises are certain and secure, just as the promise of the Saviour coming through His lineage and descendants was.

Among the two best things about this passage, the second thing is that Abram was a nobody. He didn’t stand out from the herd of humanity until the LORD chose him. Even after he was chosen, Abram was no better. He doubted God from time to time and acted foolishly. He seemed to think that the LORD’s promise was not quite as powerful as it was. He pretended his wife was not his wife out of fear - more than once! Despairing of the LORD’s promise, he had tried to choose an heir who was not of his family. He worked around the LORD’s promise with Hagar to ensure the LORD did what He promised. Abram was not a heroic person, a deserving person, or an obvious choice. *This was an act of pure grace*.

The LORD illustrates His grace in the choice of Abram. The LORD chooses because He chooses. What the LORD does is wonderful, but it is all Him, not us. The LORD takes a nobody and uses him or her to do great things and work

for unexpected and undeserved blessings. And He pours out of His abundance upon those He chooses because He wants to! It is that simple.

Now, how can we use that information? How do we go about getting chosen by the LORD?

We don't. We are chosen. As Peter reminds us, *“You, however, are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own special people, that you may extol the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). We are chosen to receive the greatest blessings in all of history. We are chosen to hear the Word of God - that powerful, living, and active Word² which creates faith and blesses everyone who hears and believes. We are here and are chosen for the remarkable blessings poured out through Abram, as promised in this text, blessings from his descendant Jesus Christ. We stand in the assembly of those who have received the blessing that the LORD said would fall on all the families of the earth in and through Abram when He said, **“I shall make you into a great nation.”**

Dear friends, we are also just as worthy of this inclusion into the family of the promise as Abram was. No one of us is particularly significant, humanly speaking, or divinely measured. We come from humble beginnings. We have not been particularly holy people. We do not come to the table, so to speak, with anything unique or individually worthy. But the LORD has chosen us, in His grace, to be His holy people, and then made us holy by forgiving us our sins with forgiveness that has been purchased on the cross by His Son. Christ is our righteousness because the LORD says so. The LORD chooses because He chooses, and we have been chosen. We are recipients of the blessing of Abram.

The writer of Psalm 43 says, *“Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against a nation that is not devout!”* (v. 1). The vindication we cry out for is not a measuring of our personal holiness but the vindication of justification through Jesus Christ because the LORD has chosen us in His grace. We are righteous with the imputed righteousness which is ours through the promise of the LORD made to Abram so many thousands of years ago. It is by pure grace, the LORD’s choosing because He chooses to do so, and we are the ones who have been blessed by the blessing of Abram, which he received to be a blessing to us! Amen.

² Hebrews 4:12

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for Your marvellous grace to sinful people. You dwell in a light that no one can approach, but You have now shown Yourself to us in Your Son Jesus Christ. Through Him we approach You confidently as Your dear children. You are the Creator and Ruler of this vast universe, yet You are concerned for the happiness and good of each one of us. Accept our humble worship and praise, and grant that we may continue in our gracious fellowship with You through Jesus Christ.

We thank You, Father, that You have chosen us not to suffer Your anger, but to receive Your forgiveness, and to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for us. Move us to hear and obey Your Son through whom You have spoken to us. Move us to follow the example that Jesus has given us. Open our hearts, that Jesus may continue to live in them. Grant that we may cling to Jesus as the only way through which people may come into Your glorious presence. Move us, both by the way in which You shape our lives, and through Your promises in the Gospel, to make our own commitment to You, in love, praise, and adoration.

Grant that we may walk in obedience to Your commandments, test all things by Your Word, cling to what is good, and have nothing to do with any kind of evil. Make us holy by Your Spirit to live the life of holiness, to which Christ has called us, and keep us free of all fault until His coming.

Father, since You desire all people to be saved and to come to know the truth, give us opportunities to proclaim Your Gospel to the ends of the earth. Inspire us to work, pray, and give for the salvation of people who as yet do not know You.

Grant that all in authority in our country may respect Your holy will. Protect from harm those who are in danger. Give peace and harmony to the nations on earth.

Make our homes harmonious places where the Holy Spirit is present with His power and wisdom. Give spiritual insight to all mothers. Grant all fathers godly leadership. Give all children an obedient spirit.

Have mercy on all who have gathered here today. Support the weak and correct the disobedient. Comfort us whenever we are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. We ask these things, and everything else we need, in the name of Your Son Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for us all. Amen.

Article: Infant Baptism

In today's Gospel we read: "*Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). Some have questioned whether Christ really had baptism in mind when He spoke these words. But our Saviour here uses an expression that was a current phrase in His day and which all Jews understood to refer to baptism. The Jews called the baptism of a Gentile his new birth, his regeneration, being born again. In the Jewish Talmud we read: "If any one become a proselyte, he is like a child new born." Again, "The Gentile that is made a proselyte, and the slave that is made free, behold, he is like a child new-born." In the Jewish mind the idea of a new birth was associated with baptism. Christ uses this term, and in v. 5 adds the words "*of water and the Spirit*," thereby clearly indicating that He was speaking of baptism. To be sure, the new birth Christ had in mind and the new birth of the Jewish baptism were by no means the same; but the words "*born of water and the Spirit*" could by Nicodemus have not been understood any other way than referring to baptism.

One objection about baptism we find today is based on the seeming inability of the child to understand and to appreciate what is being done with it. For this reason it is held that baptism is absolutely useless to the child. It is true, as we look upon the infants we baptise, we observe that sometimes they sleep, sometimes they cry, or appear altogether unconcerned as to what is being said and done. And it is quite natural that the thought comes to us, "How can this baptism be of any benefit to the infant, and what is the use or baptising him?" These rationalistic considerations are perhaps the chief reason why some defer the baptism of their children until they have reached the age of assent.

However, the same line of reasoning may have been advanced against circumcision. Still, it was definitely commanded that a child eight days old was to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12). Besides, parents do not follow that rule otherwise with their children in temporal affairs. They will do for their children what they believe to be good for them, even though these do not assent or are vehemently opposed to it. Where there is a question whether or not a thing is beneficial, the concerns of the child are not lightly to be disposed of by another; but in baptism the benefit is evident and

unquestionable: the child enters into communion with God and is made the recipient of His grace. In every case it is for the good of the child to be baptised; therefore children should be brought to baptism even though, as it may seem to us, they do not consciously assent. One may privilege a person though he be incapable of knowing it. The argument that by infant baptism we predetermine the religion of the child has as little force as the argument that by the schooling and education we give a child we predetermine his career in life. We do the one; why not the other?

In baptism large benefits and privileges are bestowed upon the child. It is a means of grace, through which God's grace and forgiveness is not only offered but through which also the Holy Spirit is given, who so operates on the heart of the child that by faith he accepts the proffered gifts. How this is one is a profound mystery to us. But for the fact that it is done, we have the authority of God, who tells us that by water and the Spirit we are born again and who calls baptism a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Children, who by their natural birth are flesh born of flesh, are by baptism reborn unto God and become partakers of all His blessings in Christ. The indifference towards, and the neglect of, infant baptism which we find in many churches of our day have their root in the denial that baptism is indeed a means of grace, through which God's Spirit is shed upon us abundantly to bestow on us grace and forgiveness and to work in the soul that faith whereby we accept these gifts and thus are regenerated. To convince them of their error, we must point to the command of Christ which tells us to make disciples of all nations, which certainly includes infants and children. We must show that all children are flesh born of flesh and do not inherit from their parents membership in the covenant of grace, but must themselves be born of water and the Spirit if they are to enter the kingdom of God. Finally, they must learn from the Bible that baptism is the means through which God bestows grace and works regeneration in the heart. Whoever understands the Biblical teaching of the natural depravity of children and of the benefit and power of baptism will not hesitate to have his children baptised.

Children's Message:

Today in one of our Bible readings, Jesus meets a man named Nicodemus. They talk about something very important: Baptism.

Can you remember where we baptise people in church? Of course, it's at the baptismal font. And what do we fill the



baptismal font with? With water, of course! How about this: Does anybody know what we say when someone is baptised? As we pour water on a person's head three times, we say words that Jesus gave us to say: *"I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* Does anybody know why little babies who are baptised, are often dressed in white? It's to remind us that in baptism all our sins are forgiven. We have been washed clean by Jesus death and resurrection. What about a candle. Usually, a candle is given to one of the parents, and the words are spoken, *"You are a light in the world. Let your light continue to shine to the glory of God."* The candle reminds us that we are now the light of the world, just like Jesus.

When a person is baptised, he or she becomes a new person, becomes part of God's family. That's what Jesus and Nicodemus talk about in our Bible reading - how we become new people in baptism.

Do any of you remember when you were baptised? Many people are baptised when they're babies, and so they don't remember. Sometimes people are not baptised until later, so they may remember. But it doesn't matter if you can remember. You are all part of God's family.

Now at the end of the Bible reading, Jesus speaks one of the most famous Bible verses of all. It's John 3:16. In that verse, we hear this: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life."* In baptism, we are made a part of God's family and given eternal life all because Jesus loves us so that He died and rose for us. So every time you see the baptismal font, remember this: God loves you and gives you eternal life. *Dear Jesus, thank You for my baptism, for making me a part of Your family, and for giving me eternal life. Amen.*



WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

8 March Mid-week LENTEN SERVICE	12 March, Sunday 3 Lent	15 March Mid-week LENTEN SERVICE
7.30pm GRN Vespers	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC 9.00am GRN LR 10.45am AUB HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR	7.30pm OAK Vespers
Wednesday, 8 March		
HYMNS: 72 292 250 48 v.3		
Sunday, 13 March		
READINGS: Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-8; John 4:5-30, 39-42		
HYMNS: 507 61 306 (54 290) 223		
Wednesday, 15 March		
HYMNS: 53 754 26 48 v.3		

Saturday, 11 March, 1.00pm. Fellowship afternoon at Bethlehem Toowoomba. All welcome to attend. Please bring something for a shared afternoon tea.

Sunday, 12 March, 1.30pm. Seminary Committee meeting at Bethlehem Toowoomba.

AGM Dates:

Lowood - Sunday, 19 March, after service.

Parish - Sunday, 30 April, after the AELC Service to be held at Oakey.

Mid-week Lenten Bulletins and Sermons will be available on the website. Printed copies will also be available the following Sunday for those who cannot attend.