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## COVER ART

The Tree of Jesse by an Unknown Miniaturist, England, 1140s, public domain

## FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE COMES THE FAMILY OF GOD



## ADVENT DEVOTIONS

NOVEMBER 28 – DECEMBER 3

The book of the genealogy of  
JESUS CHRIST,  
the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and  
Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the  
father of Judah and his brothers...

Matthew 1:1-2

## ABRAHAM, FATHER OF MANY NATIONS

“Your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you a father of a multitude of nations.”

God was about to change Abram's life in ways he could neither imagine nor begin to understand. Calling the Aramean from the land he knew, from the family he knew, God made a promise to Abram to bless him. But more than giving him land or countless offspring with a lineage of power and glory, God promised to be the God of and to Abram and his offspring. The LORD was moving Abram from one family and place to another family and place, from an earthly family with terrestrial roots to His own eternal family with a celestial home. Indeed, in God's mysterious timing, this was already an accomplished fact: “I *have* made you...” In the eternal nature of God's covenant, He changes Abram's name to show that His plan is already fulfilled even as He promises it yet to come.

Even as God moved Abraham from one family to another, God was also moving you from one family to another. As God changed Abraham's name and status, so also has He changed yours. In His baptismal grace God has called you out of one place and moved you to another. By faith, God has credited to you the same righteousness He credited to Abraham and has made you His beloved child, a member of His eternal family. No longer are you a lost sinner; rather, you are now a redeemed saint. We are sojourners here on earth, heaven is our home.

God's covenant of salvation through faith in His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, God's promises to us, are eternal. From before Abraham even unto his time, from our day even unto eternity, God's grace and mercy are everlasting. For the sake of Jesus, we were, we are, and we will be God's children, part of His divine family.

By Rev. Richard Gizynski

## WE PRAY

*Heavenly Father, You have moved us from one family to another. Thank You for making us Your children. Amen.*

## LEAH, FIRST WIFE OF JACOB

“This time, I will praise the LORD.”  
Therefore she called his name Judah.

The story of Jacob and Rachel is one of the great romances in human history. Like any good love story there is desire, but there are also obstacles which their love must overcome. Jacob loved Rachel at first sight. But Jacob had to endure 14 years of hard labor to earn the right to marry Rachel. The couple also suffered through the dishonesty of Rachel's father. The love of Jacob and Rachel makes for a great story, maybe even better than Romeo and Juliet.

Or rather, their story would be great, except for one person: Leah. Because this story is not about two people, but three. And not everyone's love story is happy.

Leah is Rachel's sister. She is also Jacob's wife. Not because Jacob loved her, but because of her father's trickery. Leah was not wanted. She was just a distraction to her husband and an irritant to her sister. In Leah's story, there is very little romance or happiness.

Some of this may sound strange to our modern ears, but there is one part that is quite familiar. Many of us also know the rejection that Leah suffered. We might wonder what can we learn from Leah's heartache, since we know it so well already.

But there is another love story here, besides that of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. There is also the story of God's love for Leah. Jacob did not want Leah. But God did. Jacob did not choose Leah. But God did. God chose her, instead of Rachel, to be the ancestor of His Son.

Perhaps you know what it's like to be rejected. But God loves you like he loved Leah. He chose you and gave you the same gift of love, His Son. And that's truly the best love story.

By Rev. Jonathan Mueller

## WE PRAY

*Lord, we thank You for choosing us even when others have rejected us. Remind us always of Your love for us. Help us to see Your love in Jesus. Amen.*

## JACOB, SON-IN-LAW OF LABAN

Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!"

Have you ever thought of the Father as your Father-in-Law? I know; it sounds funny, but in a sense it is true. We are a part of the Bride of Christ, the Church. Our Savior labored to fulfill the Law. His blood, sweat, and tears were shed to make us His Bride. Our Father-in-Law throws the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom to celebrate our marriage to the Son.

In our text Laban mistreats Jacob. He agrees to allow Jacob to marry his youngest daughter, Rachel, in exchange for seven years of work. He then pulls the ole switch-a-roo. Jacob wakes up to find Leah in his bed. Laban blusters that it just would not be right for Rachel, the younger, to be married first. Laban then gets another seven years of labor out of Jacob before allowing him to marry the woman he actually loved. That's one winner of a father-in-law.

Laban is not solely to blame for the discord within the house of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. Jacob, Rachel, and maybe Leah certainly had their roles to play in the family drama that eventually led to their children wanting to kill one another.

The primary responsibility of a husband or wife is to their spouse. God has joined them together to be their own family. They honor their father and mother. They honor the father and mother of their spouse, but their own family comes first.

As we enter the holiday season may we each honor our father and mother. May we respect and love our children so their marriages are blessed by their parents and in-laws. May this all reflect the love of our perfect Father-in-Law.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

## WE PRAY

*Father, we give thanks for the gift of Your Son as our Savior and Bridegroom. Bless our marriages. Let them be pleasing in Your sight and a source of joy and blessing for the whole family. Amen.*

## SARAH, MISTRESS OF HAGAR

"I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt."

Sarah lied. She learned to speak the serpent's language. To be fair, Abraham introduced her to its enchanting tones. She would have acted as if Hagar's Ishmael had been her own boy. The lie took on a life of its own. Deceit became a recurring character in the clan photographs. Sarah's son dabbled in the family business, her daughter-in-law and grandson conspired to mislead, eleven great-grandchildren fed their own father falsehoods, and so on. The weedy vine tangled and strangled until the family tree deteriorated into a Babylonian bramble.

Many sons had Mother Sarah. I am one of them, and so are you. We tell ourselves that abilities, appearances, or age make a human life worthwhile and purposeful. We suppose size, skills, or circumstances either improve or impair one's importance. We pretend personal choices have no public consequences. We disguise sin and death behind subterfuges like rights and freedoms. And now that we've raised them in the sinister science of hiding and multiplying silently, the brood of untruths we bore and turned loose will rise up in surprise and finally claim our lives as their inheritance.

So the Lord grafts in His own "as-if's. Divine promises patch Sarah's dishonest offsprings back together. The Heavenly Other stands in among us, holy but wholly One of us. Jesus substitutes, takes our punishment and replaces it with His perfectness. The God who adopts Abraham places Isaac in atrophied arms and wombs that don't work. Faith receives resurrection as if it were now though the reality remains not quite yet, for He wondrously reduces all our lies to jokes that we join in His laughter forever.

By Rev. Michael Salemink

## WE PRAY

*Dear Father, grant us forgiveness and faith that graft us into Your truth and love, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

## ISAAC, HALF-BROTHER OF ISHMAEL

“As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him... but I will establish my covenant with Isaac.”

For fourteen years, Abraham had a son and a promise of a son to come. Ishmael was fourteen years old when Isaac was born. Sarah had passed her time of child bearing. The hope that Isaac would come had to compete every day with the flesh and blood child Abraham was disallowed from naming his heir.

Struggling with the seeming contradictions of life and faith, we turn to prayer. Abraham prayed, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!” (Gen. 17:18). In just a few words, we can hear Abraham’s love and regard for his son.

The LORD did not disregard Ishmael. He did bless Ishmael and his descendants. Even when Abraham’s own care was lacking, God was there (Gen. 16). At the same time, the LORD would not supplant the child He intended to give as a miracle. Isaac’s improbable birth prophesied the Virgin Born to come.

These miraculous births illustrate how Jesus’ salvation comes by grace alone, not by our efforts or works. Finally, when our redemption’s full price was paid, it was a lonely Christ who hung upon the cross, praying for our forgiveness (Luke 23). That offering paid for all our sins.

That offering also gives our prayers ground for boldness. We can ask, like Abraham, for the blessing of our own children. Abraham asked for Ishmael to be blessed and received that blessing. Part of our privilege as parents and family members is to pray for one another. We are confident these prayers are heard in Christ Jesus.

God’s blessings are abundant. They are not limited to Isaac. The LORD overflows with grace and invites us to seek and find blessings through prayer in Jesus’ name.

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

## WE PRAY

*Father, fill us with zeal for the privilege of prayer. In this season of seeking gifts for friends and family, reveal to us the riches available through prayer in Christ. Amen.*

## REBEKAH, WIFE OF ISAAC

“Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the LORD has spoken.”

Abraham was a stranger in a strange land, as was his son Isaac. Even though this was the land of promise, it was not yet the home of the faithful. Instead, it was a home of pagans who worshiped false “gods” and engaged in practices too vile to mention here. How would Isaac stand, how would he remain faithful if he were isolated and alone, surrounded by idolatry?

It is not good for man to be alone; that’s been true since the beginning. Abraham knew this, and had relied upon his wife Sarah for strength. So, before his death, Abraham sent his servant back to his kin to find a wife for Isaac—a woman who would be strong for Isaac, to buttress him against the evil whims of society around them.

That servant immediately ran across Rebekah. She was kind and faithful, exactly the sort of woman who would be good for Isaac. Her family agreed she could go; she and Isaac were married. Now, this marriage was by no means perfect or without trouble (as the next chapters in Genesis show), but Isaac and Rebekah remained faithful to the LORD together. God reveal faithful spouses for our children as Isaac and Rebekah were! Or for as long as they are meant for service as singles, give them contentment and zeal for your kingdom. Would that parents prayed for faithful spouses for their children as Abraham did! They will be sorely needed in the years to come.

By Rev. Eric Brown

## WE PRAY

*Bless the husbands and wives of our land, O LORD, keeping them in fidelity to each other, and also to You, that forgiveness, life, and salvation may abound. Amen.*