

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT - December 22 & 23, 2007
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

THE LORD KEEPS HIS PROMISES GENESIS 15:1-6

This is a time of the year when many people have expectations. We may be expecting and hoping for some special Christmas gift. We may have hopes that the family can all be together and get along without fighting over the holidays. This is also the time when we may be making promises. We promise our children a certain gift for Christmas. We promise our spouse that we won't drink too much at that Christmas party. We promise ourselves that we won't go wild in our spending for the holidays.

Promises, hopes and expectations. How many times aren't we disappointed? How many times don't we break our promises? We don't have enough money to buy that expensive toy that our child wanted. We spend more than we planned to. We drink more than we should and get drunk.

When you live in a world where you see promises continually broken and you know that you can't always keep the promises that you make, then you begin to wonder if you can trust anyone and can you believe any promises that anyone makes.

As we conclude our preparations for Christmas and celebrate our Savior's birth on Tuesday, we are reminded of an important truth - **THE LORD KEEPS HIS PROMISES**. As we listen to Abram and the Lord talking to each other we remember that **I) We May Have Doubts**. But as we continue to listen to our Lord and Savior speak, **II) The Lord's Word Removes Our Fears**.

WE MAY HAVE DOUBTS

Who of us at the age of 75 would pack up everything and move to a strange and foreign land that we had never seen? Abram did just that. The Lord came to him and told him to pack up and move to a new land that the Lord would show him. The Lord promised Abram that he would make him a great nation and that someone would descend from him who would be a blessing for all the people of the earth. About ten years have passed since the Lord called Abram. He left Haran which today is in southern Turkey. He traveled to Egypt and then back up into modern day Israel. His herdsmen and shepherds and his nephew Lot's herdsmen and shepherds were having problems getting enough land to graze their flocks and herds so they split up. Abram allowed Lot to take whatever area he wished. So Lot chose the better land and went his way and Abram took what was left over and went his way. Later there was a war and kings from the north came and invaded the area where Lot and his family lived and took them captive. When Abram learned of that he got together 318 men and pursued those who had taken his nephew Lot captive and rescued him. It was after this event that the LORD appeared to Abram in a vision and spoke with him.

The first words that the LORD spoke to Abram were these, "Don't be afraid Abram; I am your prince and your great reward." (v. 1) The Lord had trained Abram to believe that he would give him this land as his possession even though Abram never owned the land during his lifetime. When Abram defeated the kings of the north, Abram knew it was the LORD who had given him this victory and he refused to accept gifts and tribute from the King of Sodom for rescuing him and his people. Abram had sworn to the LORD that he would not accept anything from the kings around him.

So through this battle and victory the LORD was teaching Abram that he was with him and he would give this land to Abram and his descendants. But now Abram had something that was troubling him. Listen to what he says to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." (Vv. 2-3) The LORD had promised Abram that he was going to be a great nation and many people

would be descended from him and along with them would be one person who would be a blessing for all the people of the earth. Abram had not seen that happen. He was now in his 80's and his wife was well passed the time of being able to have children. He was in a seemingly hopeless situation. He saw no way that God would be able to make him into a great nation; no way that a descendant from his own body would be a blessing for anyone.

How often have you been in a situation where you felt that there was no way that what God has promised you in his Word will come true? At times you may worry that the LORD will not take care of you. You may wonder how are we going to have enough food to eat, clothes to wear or a roof over our head. You may be facing the expenses of an illness or disease and wonder how are we going to see our way through this. You may be overwhelmed with guilt and shame over some thing you have done wondering, how could God ever forgive me for what I've done. Just like Abram we have our doubts, our questions and our fears. Our faith is not perfect. We aren't so sure that we can trust God because from our experiences in dealing with people in our lives, they make promises and don't keep them. They lie to us and tell us what they think we want to hear. When you live in such a world, it becomes very difficult to believe that there is anyone who really is faithful and keeps his promises. The good news is that there is someone who does keep his promises. It is the LORD our God. And Christmas is proof of his faithfulness.

THE LORD'S WORD REMOVES OUR FEARS

While Abram expresses his fears and apprehension, the LORD listens. Then listen to what the LORD says to Abram, "This man (Eliezer) will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." The Lord then took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be." (Vv. 4-5) What a statement! Abram, your descendants will be as many as the stars in the sky. Impossible? From a human point of view, definitely impossible. But nor from God's perspective. As the Bible tells us, "with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26b)

What is even more amazing is that Abram believes the Lord. Moses writes, "Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness." (v. 6) Abram trusted the LORD's promise. Abram believed that someone would come from his own body that would be a blessing for all people even for Abram. That someone, of course, is Jesus Christ. He is the descendant of Abram that God had promised. As you read the genealogy of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 1 it begins with these words, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1) Through trusting this promise the Lord credited to Abram righteousness. God considered Abram to be righteous through his faith in the promised Savior. Abram was saved the same way you and I are through faith in the Savior Jesus Christ.

This promise that the LORD made with Abram 4,080 years ago was kept. It took over 2,070 years for that promise to come to fulfillment in the village of Bethlehem when Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Over a period of 33 years Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled all the promises that God had made not just to Abraham but to all of his descendants about the work that this Savior would do for the human race. When Jesus was nailed to the cross on Good Friday that was in fulfillment of a promise God had made to us. When Jesus cried out "It is finished." that was a fulfillment of the promise that God had made to the human race. When the Lord God raised Jesus to life three days later that was in fulfillment of a promise that God had made to us.

The LORD'S word to Abram allayed his doubts and fears and Abram placed his trust in the promises that the LORD had made to him. Through Jesus Abram was forgiven and assured of eternal life in glory. By the grace of God Abram believed those promises and was saved.

It is by that same word of the LORD that you and I have our fears and doubts put to rest. We can trust our LORD because he does keep his promises. Most of these promises Abram never saw fulfilled. But we have. We know that the descendant of Abram, Jesus the Christ, has been a blessing for us. He has satisfied the justice and anger of God and won for each of us pardon and everlasting life. And Abram's descendants are now as

numerous as the stars in the sky. For you and I are the spiritual children of Abram. We are not physical descendants of Abram, but we are his spiritual descendants. We have the same faith that Abram had in the promise of his LORD. By the grace of God we trust those words of pardon, "Take heart, your sins are forgiven." (Matthew 9:2) By the power of God's Word we believe that not only are we forgiven and that we have an eternal home in heaven, but that the Lord Jesus is always with us every moment of our life. We believe that whatever happens in our life God will always work it for our eternal good, even though we may not see it now and wonder why on earth do I have to go through this right now, the Lord has a reason and purpose for this in my life and it is for my good.

On Tuesday Advent comes to an end and we begin our celebration of Christmas, the birth of Jesus. We celebrate the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abram that a descendant from his own body would be a blessing for all people. This descendant, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and our Lord. He is Immanuel, God with us, and he is always with us every day of our lives. And He will be with us forever in eternity. For the LORD keeps his promises

Amen.