

Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent, 25.ii.2007, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist, WOV Setting 5
Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16, Romans 10:8b-13, Luke 4:1-13



Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who
was and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time,
and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your
God that I have come into the land that the LORD
swore to our ancestors to give us. "When the priest
takes the basket from your hand and sets it down
before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall
make this response before the LORD your God: "A
wandering Aramean was my ancestor"

-- Deuteronomy 26:3-5b

Lent is a time for reflecting on who we are as we
stand before God. It is a time for remembering that
we stand before God not simply as individuals but as
His people, the Church. In the Creeds of the Church
we are called to remember who we are as the

believing community of Christ, teaching and preaching the faith received from the Holy Apostles and confessing that faith in spite of everything that contradicts it, even to the point of death under persecution. In the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness, we remember that we are first and foremost a community of sinners, sinners who are bound to our sins and to death which is the penalty of sin except for the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In describing ourselves to ourselves in that way, we accept responsibility not only for the evil we have done but also for the good we have failed to do.

Today's First Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy includes a kind of creed, words to be recited from memory by one making the sacrifice of the

first harvest to the Levitical priest at the LORD'S Tabernacle. The words themselves, attributed to a scroll found in the cleaning of the Temple under Josiah, King of Judah, were probably edited in their present form decades later, during the Babylonian Captivity. The head of each Israelite household was to remember something very important, and to speak this remembrance to the priest before he handed over the family's sacrifice.

What was that spoken memory to be? It could have been a recitation of all the courageous ancestors who had fought for Israel, beginning with the command of Joshua after the Exodus down to King David, down through Israel's history under King Solomon and all the King's of Judah. It could have

been a recitation of genealogy going back to Abraham or Noah, proving the antiquity of the family. It could have been a song of praise for the holiness of the ancestors, as compared with the ways of the *Goyim*, the Gentile heathen. And yet, it was not any of these things that the one who came to offer sacrifice was told to remember and to recite.

Instead, the one who would brought a sacrifice to be offered on the altar of the LORD was told to remember and to recite that he, together with all Israel, descended from a single man, a wanderer, who would have been regarded as a vagabond by the settled people of his Chaldæan homeland. The worshipper at the LORD'S altar was to recall that that single ancestor was not a Jew, not a Hebrew, not an

Israelite at all, but, rather, an Aramean, and, of himself, no one in particular. I mean, of course, Abram of Ur, a.k.a. Abraham of Canaan. If you read his story in the Book of Genesis you will meet someone who does not differ greatly from the people he encounters, not in ethical goodness, certainly not in honesty and fairness, not in intelligence and not in anything, in fact, except the conviction that he is headed in a direction and toward a destiny not of his own choosing but of God's, a God Whose name he does not even know. In other words, the very only thing that sets Abraham apart from anyone else is *faith*. Out of that faith, decade by decade and century by century, a people will grow, and a sense of what it means to be a human being will grow and develop. It

will grown and develop from those remote roots at the dawn of history right through the rise and fall of empires and civilizations, right down to a young girl who, like Abraham, will hear the voice of God, not on a starry night as Abram had, but in the terrifying and yet fascinating form of an Archangel. Mary of Nazareth, like Abram of Ur, will also say 'Yes!' to God, and through her faith and in her Son what it really means to be a human being will be revealed for all time as He heals the sick, enlightens darkened minds and as He forgives from the Cross on which His arms are outstretched in agony the very ones who nailed Him there. There, finally, we see and hear our true identity revealed in the God Who is also us, in the Man Who is completely there for others.

As we approach God and the altar of God this Lent, whether we have been neglectful of prayer and worship or faithful, whether we have loved others with the mercy, forgiveness and understanding with which Christ has first loved us, or whether we know ourselves to be self-absorbed sinners who have been of little help to anyone, whether we descend from a long line of this or that or the other sort of saint or sinner, let us remember who we really are and why. For, regardless of the gift we bring to God's altar and regardless of the gifts with which we are able to further God's Kingdom in this world, we are and would be nothing were it not for that single wandering Aramean and the gift of faith through which the Almighty called him forth and made of his one family

and great family of faith to which we, too, belong through Jesus Christ, Son of Mary, Son of Abraham, Son of God most high. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

