

THE APPEARING OF THE ANGELS TO ABRAHAM

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Lesson: Genesis 18:1-16

The reading from the Word today tells us about three angels who appeared to Abraham, as he was sitting in the door off his tent. Only they weren't really three separate angels, were they? No, they were the Lord, although He appeared to Abraham as three separate people. How do we know this? We know this because when Abraham went to greet them, he bowed very low, and called them, "My Lord."

The real, secret meaning of these three angels is that it was the Lord appearing to Abraham in three different ways. This is not so hard to understand when we remember how differently the Lord appears to us, at different times. Sometimes we think of Him as a great King; as the King of all people in the whole world, one who has all power, who knows all things, and who is everywhere at once. At other times, when we are in trouble, and we read of the Lord in a Psalm, we think of Him as a tender and loving Father of all of us. One who has power to help us, as a shepherd who gives to us, His sheep, those things which are best for us. Sometimes He appears to us as a great Judge whose all-seeing eye easily detects our wrongdoing.

So it was with Abraham. Only the Lord appeared to Abraham in three different ways at the same time; and so it looked to Abraham's earthly eyes as if there were three persons, even though he knew that it was the Lord alone.

Now, when Abraham saw that it was the Lord, he was very eager to have the Lord stay with him as long as possible. And so Abraham hurried to prepare a feast, and invited the Lord to remain with him that night. Abraham didn't know that the Lord is really with everyone all the time. And so, when the Lord appeared to him, he wanted to keep the Lord with him as long as possible, and to do Him much honor. That was why Abraham and Sarah hurried to prepare all the best things, to give the Lord water to wash His feet, to make bread, to dress and cook a whole young calf, and to set before Him butter and milk also.

And when all these things had been done, what did the Lord say to Abraham? He promised Abraham and Sarah again that they would have a son. Long before this time He had promised them a son, you may remember. And now, we are told, Sarah laughed about this; she didn't really believe it. You see, the Lord never sends mothers and fathers children after they have grown too old to take care off them; it is very seldom that parents are sent any more children by the Lord after they are about fifty years old. This is because they are not

generally strong enough or quick enough to take care of children when they become that old in the body. Now, Abraham and Sarah were very old; indeed, at this time much older than fifty years. And so Sarah laughed, not believing that they could ever have any children.

This was very foolish of Sarah, wasn't it? We know that the Lord can do anything, and that nothing is impossible to Him, not even giving people children in their old age. But Sarah didn't know this yet. You see, she didn't know the Lord very well yet. And so she didn't know how powerful He is.

But Sarah found out, right then and there, how powerful the Lord is. How did she find it out? Well, the story tells us that Sarah laughed inside herself; that is to say, she didn't laugh aloud, but only laughed inside her mind and body, and said to herself, "Shall I, who am old, surely bear a child?" Nobody could have heard her say this to herself. Yet the Lord knew that she had laughed inside herself, and that she had said this to herself, because He asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and doubt this?" So we know that the Lord could see and hear even those things which Sarah did not say out loud, but only to herself.

And when Sarah saw that the Lord knew even her most secret and hidden thoughts, she was afraid. Then she knew how powerful the Lord is and began to believe in Him. She began to believe that she and Abraham would indeed have a son, even in their old age.

Then the Lord rose up and started on His way to Sodom. And Abraham went with Him part of the way. What they said and did on the way to Sodom and Gomorrah is told in the rest of the chapter.

Would you like to memorize something that Mary said when she knew she was going to be given a little baby who was the Lord? That, too, was a very wonderful thing. It was what is called in the Word a miracle. Think of what a wonderful thing it was, that the Lord was to be born as a baby to a human mother - to a mother like yours or mine. This was even more marvelous than Sarah and Abraham having a son in their old age. And that was why Mary sang a most beautiful song, a song we sing on Christmas Day, which is the Lord's birthday. That song begins: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." These words of Mary tell how greatly joyous and thankful she was to the Lord, because He had chosen to be born as a baby under her care. When she knew that she was to have the Savior of the world as a baby, she couldn't help bursting out with such a song. Deep down inside of her, in her inmost heart, she praised the Lord and felt joyous in His wonderful gift to her.

If you begin now to memorize what Mary said—you will find it in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 46 to 55. You should know it well by

Christmas, and knowing these beautiful verses by heart will make Christmas Day more wonderful and happier than it has ever been before. And while learning by heart these verses think about the story of the Lord promising a son to Abraham and Sarah, and about His mercy in giving babies to people on the earth. *Amen.*