

VI. Advent in Biblical Perspective  
*From Christophanies to Epiphanies*  
“Christophany #4—The Angel of the Lord and the Sacrifice of Isaac”  
Genesis 22:1–19  
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December 27, 2015 – Morning sermon

We will be looking at Genesis 22 which will cover our fourth Christophany in our Advent series that points to the epiphany of Christ, His birth, and this will be our last one we cover as well. Genesis 22:1–19 says [1] *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” [2] He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. [4] On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. [5] Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” [6] And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. [7] And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” [8] Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.*

*[9] When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10] Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. [11] But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” [12] He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” [13] And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [14] So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”*

*[15] And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven [16] and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, [17] I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, [18] and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” [19] So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

A challenge for me in developing a sermon, believe it or not, is the title. How do you get the title right so that people say ‘this is something that is interesting’ and yet your using a title that is faithful to the text so that it draws people to the text and they want to listen to it? Titles are tough for me but hopefully this is succinct to the point and inviting. Although this one I didn’t have to worry about because the Lord entitles it for us. What is this narrative? God

tested Abraham. It is the Divine test of Abraham. That is extremely helpful because God has already told us why and how He tests His people. So if this is a Divine test of Abraham, now I know what this narrative is all about because of what God has said about testing His people.

Perhaps the first point would be to tell you what the Divine test is not. The Divine test is not an attempt to get people to sin. In fact James 1 makes it clear that God tempts no one to sin and cannot be tempted Himself to sin. Satan will tempt to sin. God tests. What does God test for? He doesn't test us to entrap us in sin but He tests to do three things. I always think of my ninth grade Algebra teacher when I hear test because I always thought she designed those tests in order to flunk me to keep me from playing baseball, basketball or football. As I got older I realized that was not what she was doing.

Here is what a test does and the Divine test more than any other. A test does three things. One it reveals to you what you know. Secondly a test reveals to you what you don't know. When God brings a test among His people it is to reveal what we know and you'll find out what Abraham knows when he is tested that is pretty astounding. Secondly, God's test reveals to us what we don't yet know that we need to know. In other words, God's test proves what you know and then shows what you don't know so you can improve upon what you know. Thirdly, the Divine test is designed to reveal what is in our hearts. Are there any entangling or embedded sins that need to be pulled up by the roots? One commentator said about the test of God, are there any pockets of poison that need to be lanced by God's grace for His glory? That is what we are about to find out in the life of Abraham. When we look at this test of Abraham we will see something that has an immediate purpose and an ultimate purpose.

Before I get to that I want to review a little up to this point. We have affirmed the purpose of Advent which is to celebrate the coming, the epiphany of God. The epiphany is the out shining of God's glory that came into this world where the grace of God has appeared. Christ has come and taken upon Himself a body and God's gift to us came wrapped in a body to quote Michael Card. In that body He was 100 percent God and 100 percent Man. When we celebrate the epiphany of Christ's birth we're also celebrating the anticipation of Christ coming back in that same body now glorified, bearing the marks of our redemption in His hands, feet and side, whereby we will be with Him forever. The epiphany is the Incarnation.

What is the Incarnation? The Incarnation/Epiphany is a work of God's grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins, and will come again for us to be with us forever. God is no prisoner to His transcendence. He, the One who is high and lifted up, has found a way to come to us. He has come to take our place to save us from our sins and He is risen in glory. So Christmas for us is on the one hand rejoicing for the Lord has come and we're restless for Him to come again to bring to completion what He has done, come quickly Lord Jesus.

The whole Old Testament is pointing to this – prophecy after prophecy, types, shadows, narratives – and one of the ways God informed us of the epiphany of Christ is by Old Testament theophanies. What are theophanies or more precisely Christophanies? They are pre-incarnate appearances of God in anticipation of the Incarnation. There are a number of them in your Bible and we've only had time to look at a couple of them and there are just four of them in our series this year. They are miraculous and temporary. They give a message by both the appearance and the words that are given. God has miraculously removed Himself whether He came in the glory cloud or The angel of the Lord or Captain of hosts to point to the coming of His Son in His Incarnation which is the ultimate theophany.

Why is it the ultimate one? It is because it is the final one and is the forever one. Jesus will have that body for all of eternity and that should give you great joy because there is no way for you to see God otherwise. Veiled in flesh the Godhead seen, hailed the Incarnate Deity. Angels can't even look upon Him for they have wings to cover their eyes but we will be able to look upon our Savior in His glorified body, seeing the marks of our redemption. That is the ultimate theophany but there are these Old Testament theophanies and we've already looked at three of them.

The first was the angel of the Lord and the burning bush. When it says 'the' angel of the Lord that is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ for a moment, miraculously to give a message. In Exodus 3 the angel of the Lord spoke from the burning bush and He told Moses to do two things – deliver My people from the bondage of slavery and I'll use you to bring judgment upon Pharaoh and Egypt. That pre-incarnate appearance had its trajectory when the angel of the Lord would come hundreds of years later. When He comes He will deliver us not from the bondage of slave labor but from the bondage of the slavery of our sin. He will judge not just Egypt but the kingdom of darkness and not just a Pharaoh but Satan himself. He would come to set His people free, defeating His and all their enemies.

We moved to a second one which involved Moses' successor Joshua. Joshua was standing in front of Jericho and sees this warrior with a drawn sword. Joshua says "Are you for us or are you for them?" The warrior says "Wrong question, for it's not am I on your side but the question is are you on My side for I am the Commander of the Lord's host." There Joshua is told to take off his shoes like Moses for this was holy ground. That trajectory of that One who led Joshua into the victory of Jericho and the delivery of the Promised Land is the One who comes at Bethlehem. It is Christ in that manger who is the Divine Warrior with the drawn sword who has come with boots on the ground to defeat sin, Satan, death, hell and the grave and to deliver us to the land of the ultimate promise in the new heavens and the new earth. You don't win wars without boots on the ground.

Then we looked at the glory cloud in Exodus 33 and from that the angel of the Lord taught us. I will set My people free but it is not freedom that is your joy. Here is your joy. The felt and sustained presence is more important than any success in life; in truth, it is more important than life itself. For Moses said 'Lord if You don't go up with us then don't lead us up from here. We would rather die in the wilderness than go up with success in the land of promise without You.'

Now we come to a fourth Christophany and I would love to go over all of them in the Old Testament but this is where we'll end up for now in this series. This is the one where the angel of the Lord speaks to Abraham two times. This is a pre-incarnate appearance in Genesis 22 where a theophany, a Christophany occurs and Christ speaks to Abraham. The setting is just full and pregnant of meaning for us. It is a test that kind of has two things. On the one hand we will see in Abraham the profile of saving faith. Everyone believes something. I won't ask you if you're a believer because I know you're a believer but my question for you today would be, do you believe in Jesus? Even the devils believe. The question is not whether you're a believer but the question is in what and who do you believe. How did you get here? Why are you here? Where are you headed and what is this all about? Every person has a faith world and life view. If you have a saving faith, there are certain marks of genuine saving faith in the Lord of glory. We will see that in Abraham. Secondly, we will see something about the faithfulness of the God who saves us. We will see something of the depth of the Covenant God who saves His covenant people.

So let's walk through this text together. Here is the setting. Abraham has been drawn out of the land of the Chaldeans. God's sovereign love and grace has brought him up out of the Gentiles. Here is the gentile that will be the father of His covenant people. In Genesis 12 He tells Abraham that He will be a God to him and his seed after him. I will give you a nation and make you a blessing, Abraham. In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed. In Genesis 15 He sets the covenant. God walks through the covenant to tell Abraham that He will break the sacrifice of the covenant in two for I will walk through it and save you by grace. So it says that Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham was saved by grace through faith in the promises of God that would be fulfilled in the Promised One, Jesus Christ. Then the covenant is again reaffirmed in Genesis 17. He sustains Abraham and helps him rescue Lot and upholds him because of all the enemies that are around him.

This same God now comes to him and says "Abraham, Abraham" and gives him a command. In fact He gives him three commands – take, go, and sacrifice. Abraham says two times to God and one time to his son, 'here am I.' God tells Abraham, 'take your son' for Abraham is a real father and Isaac is his real son, so notice the modifiers. Take your only son. There is no Ishmael for he has been disinherited and is gone. Take the son whom you love. What is not said is take the son whom I gave you, because that is understood. God gave him Isaac through a miraculous birth. It is not like the virgin birth which is a unique miraculous birth but a miraculous birth. Any time a 90 plus year old woman and a 100 year old man have a child that is miraculous. He is the one who was promised and Isaac now is coming of age. Abraham you go to a particular place and at that place you sacrifice your only son whom you love, to Me, the one I gave to you. He even gives him the general vicinity of Mount Moriah.

You will find this Mount mentioned another time in the Bible in II Chronicles 3. Mount Moriah is geographically the collection of mountains where now Jerusalem sits. Then it was an old Jebusite city. He had already been there for they had a then ruler by the name of Melchizedek. It was the same place where David would go to purchase a threshing floor from a man named Araunah. It is the same place Solomon would go and build a temple on one of the mountain tops of that collection of hills, Mount Moriah. It is that place where God sends Abraham.

He goes on his formal two days journey and arrives on the third day which echoes Exodus 19:11 when they arrived at Mount Sinai to prepare themselves for two days to consecrate themselves on the third day. Once he gets there God will tell him which mountain to go up on to sacrifice his only son, his promised son, the one he loves. So what will Abraham do? The text will tell you what he'll do. Early the next morning is the Bible's way to tell you without hesitation he immediately obeyed. He is not like the one who thinks that maybe if he stays in bed long enough this challenge will disappear. He goes to Mount Moriah to sacrifice but he doesn't go by himself.

This narrative has five characters – two major, two minor and one essential. The two major ones are obvious, Abraham and Isaac. Now two minor characters are seemingly introduced. They are two servants. I think these servants are here for three reasons. One, Abraham is 100 plus years old and he needs help. Not only that something extraordinary is about to happen for in the providence of God what do you have? Let every fact be confirmed by two or more witnesses and so now we have two witnesses that you can call on. The third reason is these two young men will be the occasion and the recipients of one of the most astonishing statements in the Bible.

Even though the text does not tell us which mountain Abraham went up on I have my suspicions. In Mount Moriah there is Mount of Olives, Mount Golgotha, Mount Zion, Mount Shechum, Mount Gerizim and all these mountains and He has already identified one of them. They get there and his son Isaac says “Father, here’s the wood, there’s the fire and the knife, so where’s the lamb?” The second time Isaac says ‘father’ Abraham says “here I am son.” Abraham says “Jehovah Jireh, will provide for Himself the lamb.”

In Hebrew the word Jireh in most of your translations *almost* always is translated the Lord will provide. I would suggest just for the sake of our understanding that ‘will provide’ is the secondary meaning. The primary meaning of Jireh is ‘see to it.’ In other words, you could translate this as the Lord will see to it. Where is the lamb? The Lord will see to it. I actually think both of the meanings to Jireh apply here. The Lord will see to it and provide for Himself the lamb. He will not just see to it and provide for Himself the lamb but will provide Himself as the Lamb. So the wood is laid upon Isaac to go up the mountain.

Then comes this astonishing statement. Abraham turns to his two servants and says “The lad and I will go up on the mountain and worship and *we* shall return.” Many have read into this that Abraham had this prescient view where he would get up there and know God would never have him sacrifice his son. Abraham just knows that God gave him this son and that his offspring would come through Isaac and that his offspring would be as many as the sands of the sea. If God wants him to sacrifice Isaac then God will raise Isaac up and we will both come back down this mountain, because God will keep His promises. The servants have been chosen in the providence of God to hear his confidence in the power of God to resurrect and in the faithfulness of God to keep His promises.

Three times in the text it tells you that Abraham and Isaac went up the mountain together. When they get to the place for the sacrifice the wood is taken off Isaac and Isaac is placed on the wood. Isaac carried the wood. The father carried the knife and the fire. Now the father brings the fire and the knife. Take, go and sacrifice – the moment the knife is raised the insistent and urgent words come from the Christophany. Now we see the fifth and most essential character in this narrative. It is the One who will be back to this mountain hundreds of years later Himself, now says to Abraham, “Abraham, Abraham, do not lay your hands upon your son. The test has revealed that you have no rival in your affection and allegiance to Me, even your only son whom you love. You have placed your trust in Me and believe in Me and nothing stands between us.”

Notice the language in the text, for He provides the ram caught in the thicket instead of *your* son, in place of your son. There is still a sacrifice but the Lord has seen to it and provided the ram in place of Abraham’s son. The son goes free. Abraham and Isaac come back down the mountain and the mount was known that ‘this is the mount of the Lord where the Lord will provide.’ Then the Lord appears a second time and says “I know now therefore you need to know I will bless you and you will have a people from all the nations of the earth that the stars cannot match nor the sands of the sea. I will bless My covenant and I now swear by My own Name, I will do it.” So we have seen that the test has revealed Abraham’s faith.

The New Testament captures this test of Abraham’s faith very clearly. Let’s look at the book of James. James affirms that everyone says they believe but who has saving faith? He tells us of one of the marks of saving faith and Abraham becomes an illustration of it. James 2:18–24 says [18] *But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* (Works don’t save you but they show your faith. Your faith is in Christ and His work but when you have faith in Christ you have

a faith that works.) [19] *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!* [20] *Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?* (This is dead faith but we want a living faith.) [21] *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?* [22] *You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;* [23] *and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.* [24] *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

He is telling us that it is not your works that save you or that your works plus your faith saves you but he is telling you that God saves you by faith and that a saving faith is an active faith, a working faith. It shows itself with the obedience. The obedience doesn't save. The obedience doesn't justify you but it justifies your faith as a saving faith. Will it be perfect obedience? No, but there will be obedience there. You can rest assured that no faithful works of God's people by His grace through faith to Christ will go unnoticed by the Lord. They don't even go unnoticed by the world. They manifest the integrity of our profession of faith. It's not thing to profess faith and it's another thing to possess faith. Possessors of faith is evidenced by their lives, not with perfection but with a changed life. So it was with Abraham. Now I know the faithfulness of Abraham as a covenant child was manifested. There were no rivals to his allegiance and affection to the Lord.

We also see that Abraham knew his promises. He knew God's Word. Let's look at Hebrews. Hebrews 11:17–19 says [17] *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, [18] of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” [19] He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.* This one could be and would be raised if this was the promised one through which his offspring would come, then he would be raised from the sacrifice, therefore Abraham believed the promises of God. Abraham knew that if his offspring were to come from Isaac then he knew and believed God would raise Isaac up for those promises to be fulfilled. Abraham not only knew his God who first loved him and nothing rivaled that love for his God, not even his only son, but he also knew the promises of God.

While there are no unaffirmed acts of obedience that God does not honor in the lives of His people, there are no unkept promises from God for all of the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ and Abraham knows that. What he doesn't yet know is that these promises will be fulfilled in a Promised One greater than Isaac and that Promised One is Jesus. Here is your takeaway.

The Lord who tested and affirmed the authenticity of Abraham's faith not only provided the ram in Isaac's place on the Mount of the Lord would in the same place give Himself as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” He went up on that mountain in that collection of mountains at Mount Moriah and there was ready to give his son but God would see to it and provide a ram in his place at the Mount of the Lord. The angel of the Lord that provided the ram, caught in the thicket, would be the One who would later come to Bethlehem, straight lined to Mount Calvary, and when He would get to Golgotha there would be no ram caught in the thicket but there would be the Lamb of God freely giving Himself to save us that we might have life. So instead of us it was Him.

There was a straight line from Isaac to Mary to Joseph to Bethlehem to Jesus at Mount Calvary, back to the mountain hundreds of years later in the mountains of Mount Moriah. There

this Savior at the foot at that mountain like the echo of Isaac says “Father, here’s the fire, here’s the knife, here’s the wood, where’s the lamb?” Jesus in the garden sweating drops of blood would say to His Father, “Father, is there any other way, is there something else caught in the thicket?” “No, My Son there is nothing caught in the thicket. You must go.” His Son says the echo of Abraham, “Here I Am, for behold it is written of Me I delight to do Your Will. You have prepared a body for Me.”

So He goes in my place, a vicarious substitutionary atoning work. Two witnesses will hang beside Him. He will go up and in three days this One will rise triumphant, consecrated to the sacrifice that He had accomplished. There are no nuances whatsoever. When Isaac went up on that mountain, Abraham went with him to put him to death. When Jesus goes up on that mountain, it is His Father that puts Him to death. It pleased Him to crush His Son in our place who paid for our sins but unlike Abraham with Isaac, the Father, the God of glory, who put His Son to this atoning death in our place, did not go with Him. I know He didn’t because I hear the Lamb of God cry from Calvary. He bore the wood (cross) up the mountain and they laid Him on the wood. In the midst of it He cries out “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Three times it says that Abraham went up with him but this Father would be separated from His Son, who would descend into our hell and would pay for all our sins, but know this; no promise of God is unkept. The Divine oath – I swear by Myself I will save My people – and the Lord would see to it. He would provide Himself as the Lamb whereby you and I would have eternal life.

I do not know where you are today. If you have been attending regularly I want you to know you stand under the judgment of a God of holiness and justice and He will be no means leave the guilty unpunished but this is a God of grace and mercy – Jehovah Jireh. He has seen to it to provide a Sacrifice for sinners so please say to Him, not to me or Briarwood, “Here am I. Just as I am without one plea but that Your blood was shed for me. You have kept Your promise. You have provided. Jesus I come.” I would love to pray with you if you’ll come and see me. We can’t save you but there is a Savior. That third day He arose and consecrated Himself to receive you for everlasting life. So come to Him.

You might say ‘I’ve done that.’ Then I want you to be Abraham. Say “Here am I Lord, nothing rivals my affection and allegiance to You. Uncover in my heart any pockets that it may – not even the children or job or marriage or the things You gave me – nothing rivals my affection and allegiance to You. You have provided Yourself for me. I am Yours because by grace You are mine, Christ alone, here am I.” Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word, this Advent season, seeing these anticipations of the coming of Christ in the Old Testament. We are rejoicing in Your faithfulness. This day if you have made that commitment to Jesus you just simply come to Him. Don’t fall prey to the thinking of you need to go get better to come to Him for you can’t provide. Only the Lord can provide and in His mountain He has provided it and it’s called Calvary so come to Him. He went to the cross for you. Father, would You please assist me and all of my brothers and sisters as we move toward the second coming of our Savior and into this new year? We know not when You’ll come but we know what is before us and nothing would rival our allegiance and affection, and wherever it does for we know there are places, point them out in our heart that we might die to ourselves and live unto Him who died and rose again for us. Christ alone, I pray in Jesus’ Name and glory only in His Name, Amen.

## Power Point

### INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

*The Incarnation/Epiphany is a work of God's grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins, and will come again for us to be with us forever.*

### CHRISTOPHANY #4

#### THE ANGEL OF THE LORD AND THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

##### *A DIVINE TEST DESIGNED TO REVEAL....*

- *The nature of saving faith as God's gift of grace.*
- *The Covenant faithfulness of God's saving grace.*

### LIFE TAKEAWAY

*The Lord who tested and affirmed the authenticity of Abraham's faith not only provided the ram in Isaac's place on the Mount of the Lord would in the same place give Himself as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*