

In today's Gospel our Lord says to the Jews, "**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, he saw it and was glad.**" This can be none other than what we hear in that moving account of Genesis 22. Abraham has finally, after years of waiting and wandering, made a home in the land of Canaan and has received a son from his beloved Sarah. He then receives the stark command from God to offer this, his beloved son as a sacrifice, a burnt offering, to be killed, dismembered, and burned up.

The astounding thing is that Abraham is totally willing to do it. Stands ready, Isaac bound, the knife in his own hand, ready to do the deed until the angel urgently cries out to stop, and Isaac's life is spared, his place taken by another, a ram caught by the horns in the thicket, this, and not Isaac, offered as the sacrifice. And then the Lord gives the promise once again, "**in your Offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.**"

In these events and words, the willing offering of the beloved son, the son long-promised, the giving of a substitute in Isaac's place, another to die in his stead, and the promise of the Lord that from Abraham and Isaac would come the One through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, in all this, Abraham sees and hears in shadow, type, and promise, what happened in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That joy and rejoicing come at holy Christmas is easy and obvious. We sing our Gloria in Excelsis Deo then with the angels, praising God for the birth of the Savior. But what we as Christians must always be at pains to remember, what flies in the face of superficial joy for so many, is the reason and purpose for His birth. He is born the Savior. He is God's Son born as a man to save His people from their sins. And what the Old Testament Scriptures teach us, from Genesis 3 and God's clothing of Adam and Eve's naked shame with skins, to the many and varied sacrifices instituted at Sinai, there is no salvation, no forgiveness of sins, without the shedding of blood.

Isaac deserved to die. Abraham and Sarah, their servants all deserved to die. And so do you. But what Abraham sees illustrated, lived out, is that God wills not that the sinner die for his own sins, but that He will send another, a substitute, a vicar, to make satisfaction for our sins by bearing the punishment, shedding His blood for them. That is the true source of Christian joy. That is what Abraham rejoiced in. He saw how it is that Satan's head would be crushed by the Seed of the Woman, for that blessed Offspring, pledged to come from Abraham's own body, would be bruised by death, offered in the stead of all humanity.

This is abhorrent to the unbelieving world. It seems unjust, that the innocent should die and the guilty live. We ought to sing today "A murderer they slay, the Prince of Life they save." That is what human justice demands. But no. We sing, "The sinless Son of God must die in sadness; the sinful child of man may live in gladness; Man forfeited his life and is acquitted; God is committed." Because that is what divine justice demands. Only the sinless One can satisfy what sinful man owes.

Even many a Christian objects to this. Couldn't Christ Jesus just be a conquering hero, destroying death, defeating Satan? Couldn't we see in Him the ultimate example of self-sacrificial love? Blood, sacrifice, debt, and payment. It all sounds so base, so dirty and low. Because it is. We are dealing with the basic things of eternity and judgment. The sinner deserves to die, to have his blood shed. You deserve, for all the wicked

things you have done, you deserve your life put to an end, all your lifeblood spilt, your body consumed in fire. That is the truth.

Foreshown to father Abraham, our father in faith, confident trust in what God promises, accomplished in time in that week we call "Holy," is that our God Himself suffers this for us. In our place, our stead, vicariously, He makes satisfaction for all that was demanded. A perfect life, no sin, is offered up for all sin, to be snuffed out for all our lives that are anything but perfect. It is in this that death is destroyed and Satan is defeated. He does this not by suffering it as abuse, but in perfect love for His Father whose desire is that neither Isaac, Abraham, or we, suffer death, because the Holy and Blessed Trinity does love His creation.

Our greatest joy is not Holy Christmas, but Holy Week and Easter. There we see in perfect detail the love and saving work of God for us, that He willingly and happily takes our place. That His life is not taken from Him, seized by unbelievers in the temple, but offered by Himself on the altar of the cross, within sight of the very place where it was foreshadowed to Abraham, and in all the sacrifices of old in the temple, built centuries later on that very spot. Like David and Isaiah after him, Abraham saw this, the day the Lord had decreed from the foundation of the world, and he rejoiced. We see it too, no longer in prophecy or type, but made, accomplished reality. What we most needed to be done for us has been done, is fulfilled, and given to us. May this be our source of joy.