Reading. Genesis 12: 1-3 and 18: 1-10

In the next few family services, we’d planned to talk about God’s promises, in the bible, but I guess that not many children will be reading this.

However, they will have used the word frequently. How often do we hear children saying, ‘Promise’? I know my own children did and sadly there might have been times when, having made a promise, I failed to deliver. I do hope not.

The first of God’s promises we are looking at are those made to Abram, (later to be called Abraham).

Interestingly, God doesn’t use the word ‘promise’ here, he just makes a statement. Having told Abram, to leave his country and his people, he told him of the amazing ways, in which he would be blessed.

He would head up a great nation, he would be blessed and would be a blessing. His name would be great and he would have God’s protection and, ultimately, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him.

Wow!!

Do you think Abram took all this in, straight away? I doubt it and, if he did see the truth of some of it, in his lifetime, he couldn’t have realised the true significance of the words, ‘ All peoples on earth will be blessed through you’,

The birth of Jesus, God’s own Son, to be our Saviour and that through his life, death and resurrection, we have received our own promises, from God, too. The promise of the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with God. Definitely a ‘Wow’!!

But, and there is a but, we have to obey God’s instructions, to repent of our sins and turn to Christ. I guess, for some, that might be harder than upping sticks and moving on.

Before any of this could take place for Abraham, however, he has to trust God and follow His instructions and he did. He followed the Lord and set off for the land of Canaan, taking his wife and his nephew Lot and all his possessions.

Thankfully, there have been Christians down the ages, who have been willing to do just that. Often, without family and possessions.

It reminds me of when we were children and going on a journey. We might have known where we were going but probably not how to get there, we just trusted the adults to know the way. That’s exactly how Abram must initially have felt, he trusted God completely. Would we have been able to do that?

The next verses we are looking at today come a few chapters further on, when Abraham was near Marmre, just north of Hebron.

Maybe, at this point, we need to remind ourselves that Abraham was nobody in particular. He didn’t stand out until God chose him. He was far from perfect, like us. He doubted God from time to time (does that sound familiar?) He acted foolishly and seemed to think, that God’s promise was not quite as powerful, as it turned out to be.

More than once, out of fear, he pretended that his wife was not his wife.

At Sarah’s suggestion, because she was now so old and despairing of God’s promise, he produced an heir by Hagar, his wife’s Egyptian servant. Perhaps, somehow trying to ensure that God kept his promise. But that certainly wasn’t the answer. God doesn’t need our help to fulfil his promises. He chooses ordinary people, like Abraham, to serve him and then, by an act of grace he enables them.

So, now we have Abraham, standing outside his tent, by a group of trees, near the town of Mamre (near Hebron), at midday. Siesta time. He’d made it to Canaan. Suddenly, we’re told there are three men in front of him. Not spotted at a distance, through shaded eyes, just there.

Abraham welcomed the strangers, bowing low to the ground and beseeching them not to pass by. He uses the words, ‘my Lord’. Did he recognise God?

The lavish welcome and provision (despite the inconvenience of their timing) was typical of hospitality among nomadic desert people, even today.

As Abraham watches them eat, theLord, having enquired about Sarah, says,

‘I will surely return to you about this time next year and your wife Sarah will have a son’.

God kept his promise and Isaac was born a year later, the father of twelve sons, who became the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. How amazing was that? It wouldn’t be the first time, in the bible, that God promises a son to unlikely people.

I’d like to finish by telling my own story, as it reinforces how God uses very ordinary people to fulfil his plans. (I apologise to those who’ve heard this before - time to go and put the kettle on).

About 45 years ago I was in Church on my own. Spread before me, on the chancel step, were sheets of newspaper, on which rested all the church brass and the wherewithal to clean it. Yes, it was my turn to do the brass.

Quite suddenly I heard the words, ‘You will be one of the first ordained women priests’. I remember, quite clearly, thinking what a stupid thought. The word ‘priest’ wasn’t part of my vocabulary, I’d always known ‘vicars’ and our vicar was having a terrible time, with some of his parishioners. Who’d want his job?

I can honestly say that I forgot the incident completely, until I felt God’s call to ordination. However, nearly twenty years later, those words came true. After many ups and downs (including doubting) I was one of the first women, to be ordained as a priest. Not the first, because the Bristol Diocese went first, closely followed by my Diocese, Oxford.

That was indeed amazing. I was a very ordinary full time mum, doing ordinary things. Besides brass cleaning, I was on the church cleaning rota and I helped in Children’s Church. Later, I was able to add sides-man, intercessor and coffee maker to that list. (Never flowers). Now, by the grace of God, I’m able to add priestly duties, which are no more or no less important, than the others. As it was for Abraham, it was always the trusting, in what seemed impossible, which was the hardest part but do remember the words, displayed in Stowe Church:-

‘With God all things are possible’. Believe me, they are.

Amen.