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Sermon on Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7  
All Saints' Episcopal Church  
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**“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight,  
O, Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”**

In this morning's Old Testament lesson, the Lord appears to Abraham as Three Men. Abraham immediately recognizes Them as God, but how? This is the question I want you to consider: “How do we recognize the Lord or his messengers (*angeloi*) in our lives? In searching through the scriptures, I discovered what I believe was the answer for Abraham, and it has two parts: First, Abraham recognizes the Lord because he sees with the eyes of faith. And, second, he recognizes God because they have had a long-term relationship, going back approximately twenty-five years. There is one more factor, which I will introduce shortly.

In Genesis 12, Abram, son of Terah, receives the command “Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.” Abram asks no questions; he simply “. . . departed as the Lord had told him.” How did Abram recognize God in this commandment? We're not told in what form – if any – He manifests Himself at that time, merely that Abram acts upon His spoken instructions. Maybe we had better add that Abraham *listens with the ears* of faith. Later in Genesis 12, “. . . the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “Unto thy seed will I give this land.” Abram immediately builds an altar to the Lord in that place.

In Genesis 15, we're told “the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision,” which gives us another clue as to Abraham's responses to these visitations: The sense in which the Genesis author uses “the Word” seems inseparable from the way in which it is used in the Gospel of John: “. . . the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In other words, the Lord and His Word are inseparable. At this time, God's Word to Abram is “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” Once again, Abram sees with the eyes of faith and listens faithfully.

In the years that intervene between this visitation and the next important one, in Genesis 17, Sarai continues barren, yet the Lord repeats His promises that Abram's descendants shall be like the stars in the firmament. When Abram is 99 years old, the Lord appears to him and identifies Himself in no unequivocal terms: “I am the Almighty God; walk with Me and be thou perfect.” It is at this time that the Lord states the terms of His covenant with Abram, including the requirement for circumcision of his male

offspring and any other males, including slaves, who live in his household. Also part of this covenant is a name change for Abram and Sarai, who thereafter are Abraham and Sarah.

But there's more to this incident in Genesis 17. In verse 17, after the Lord has promised that He will bless Sarah, ". . . and she shall be a mother of nations . . .," Abraham falls upon his face and laughs and says in his heart, "Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old bear?" Abraham's laughter at this time foreshadows Sarah's at the time of the Lord's most significant visit.

Which brings us to the incident in today's reading: "And the Lord appeared unto [Abraham] in the oaks of Mamre as he sat in the tent door, in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw Three Men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My Lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that, you may pass on - since you have come to your servant.'" S

"So they said, 'Do as you have said.'"

So now we have come full circle, to the crucial moment when Abraham recognizes the Lord in the Three Men. That the Lord manifests himself in this form is certainly a prefiguration of the Trinity, in which He allows the patriarch to see him in His Triune aspects of the Father, the Son (who is also "the Word"), and the Holy Spirit. Abraham - seeing with the eyes of faith - literally *runs* to greet Them: he does not hesitate, he does not demand identification: he knows exactly Who his Divine Visitants are. He responds unstintingly with the full services of hospitality, even as Paul later admonishes in his letter to the Hebrews, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Abraham is anything but unaware: he has seen with the eyes of faith and recognized his Lord.

However, Abraham's fulsome hospitality is not the end of this Visitation: instead, we are treated to the rather comic incident of Sarah's laughter. One of the Three - presumably the Father - foretells "I shall certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah, thy wife, shall have a son."

"And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind Him. . . . Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?'"

"And the Lord said unto Abraham, 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh . . . ? Is anything too hard for the Lord?'" . . . "Then Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. But He said, "Oh, yes, you did." I can't help but envision a twinkle in the Lord's eye as he twits Sarah for her lack of faith. Perhaps she simply doesn't have Abraham's gift for seeing with the eyes of faith.

*Selah.*