

By the Oaks of Mamre - Genesis 18.1-15(21.1-7)
Jegudiel's Story



From St James church, Mangotsfield, Bristol

(Jegudiel, is one of the seven archangels of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In their iconography he is depicted holding a crown and a three pronged whip, which symbolises reward from God for the righteous and punishment for sinners. He is known as a bearer of God's love. For this story I think that appropriate.)

In heaven, when the Lord calls your name you come, listen and then go and do what he has asked. On this occasion The Lord summoned two of us from his heavenly host and asked us to go with him to visit Abraham. He asked us to dress as his servants, so that we would not scare Abraham when we arrived.

We walked through the hilly region near to the small village of Hebron and among the hot and dusty outcrops we found a simple tent pitched. It was made of goatskins sewn together and suspended over some stakes driven into the ground. It provided a degree of shelter from the burning sun during the day, and later would keep the occupants warm in the cold of the night. You could tell that the owner of the tent was wealthy because he could afford to use sufficient goatskins to create a door to provide some privacy. His wife had taken time to weave some mats from rushes for the floor, so that they wouldn't have to sleep on the stony ground beneath. The tent was sensibly placed near to a stand of oak trees so that they would give a degree of shelter from the sun as well.

As we approached, a man rose from the ground beneath one of the trees and rushed towards us, his arms open in welcome. This then was Abraham, the chosen one of The Lord. He bid us very welcome and led us towards the sheltered spot where he had been sitting. He offered us food and drink, and when after a brief nod from The Lord we accepted, he ushered us towards the mat he had been sitting on under the tree and rushed off to do his duty as a host. We watched as he dashed first to a nearby pen of goat kids and chose the best that he could see. As he dragged it away from the pen, I could hear him call to a servant to come and prepare it for us to eat. He dashed then to the tent and asked his wife, Sarah, to take some of the best

flour that she had ground that morning, and prepare and cook some bread for the visitors to eat. He disappeared behind the tent for a while and when he came back, he was staggering under a big jar of water to wash with and a servant was following on behind carrying three beakers for us to drink out of.

When he had seen that we were relaxed and refreshing ourselves with the cool water, he dashed off again and came back carrying some goats milk and curds, which he presented to us to eat while we waited for the bread and the kid to be readied. While we ate and drank in the heat of the day, Abraham stood quietly under the tree behind us and watched us, ready to get us anything we should need. The perfect host.

I spent some of the time looking at Abraham, the chosen one of The Lord. He was old, by any standards he was old, and I wondered whether this visit would be to call him home. He seemed vigorous enough though. He had a mane of grey hair and a long grey beard. He was dressed in a long shapeless garment of woven flax, and I could see when I looked around that wild flax was growing abundantly in the area. I could see hanging up near the door of the tent a cloak of woven goat and camel hair to keep out the night chills and give some protection from the rains when they came.

The tent door remained closed while we were eating, but we knew that Sarah was behind it, as every so often the door would twitch as if she was trying to hear better what was being said.

Eventually we had eaten and drunk sufficient and were sitting back and relaxing. The Lord called Abraham to come

and sit with us, which he reluctantly did. I noticed that the door of the tent twitched open a bit, all the better to hear what was going to be said next.

The Lord asked Abraham,

‘Where is your wife Sarah?’

Abraham nodded his head towards the tent.

‘She is there in the tent.’

We all looked towards the tent, and the door twitched shut quickly. We all looked back at The Lord. He continued

‘Thank you for your hospitality. You have been most kind to us. I will return again in due season, and when I return you will have a son.’

We all turned as we heard from behind the door a full throated laugh. We turned to look at Abraham, who blushing a deep red went to the tent pulled open the door and ordered Sarah to come out. On seeing everyone’s stern faces she sobered up and came out to face us all.

The Lord looked at her sternly.

‘Why did you laugh at me?’

‘I didn’t laugh,’ she said. ‘That was just a cough!’

‘No that was a laugh!’ he said sternly.

She turned defiant.

‘If it was a laugh it was because, well, look at the two of us. I am long past the age of child bearing and he is no younger than I am. Do you really think that we can now in our old age make a child when we could not in our youth?’

‘Nevertheless,’ said the Lord, ‘when I return you will have a son. For for me all things are possible.’

Sarah still looked disbelievingly at him. At a nod from the Lord we all got up and picked up our staffs and began to walk off in the opposite direction to the one we had come. After a quick look at where Sarah still stood Abraham ran after us and stopped us.

‘Please do not take any notice of Sarah. She has long given up hope of having a child and she is bitter. She tried to give me a son with her servant Hagar, but that didn’t work out and I had to send Hagar and Ishmael away. She broods all of the time, even now in her old age. He shrugged his shoulders. Sorry.’ he said.

The Lord smiled.

‘You just do your part, and I will do mine, and when I come again we will see her laughing for joy not sadness.’

The Lord nodded to us to continue on our journey and we turned and headed in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham stayed the Lord’s hand and turned him back to talk to him again, but that is another story for which we don’t have time today.

We did return again in due season. As we walked towards the stand of oaks at Mamre the tent was still there and the man was there sitting under the tree, but this time he didn’t

get up to run and greet us, because in his arms he held a baby. The door of the tent was open and Sarah sat there contentedly watching Abraham rock his son and sing to him to soothe him to sleep. He looked up as we reached the trees, and when he saw us his face split in a huge grin. He held up the baby to us.

‘I have a son,’ he said. ‘I have a son.’

The Lord turned to where Sarah was sitting. She stood and looked at him.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘You have brought laughter to me and anyone who hears will laugh with me. Who would ever have said that that they would see Abraham nursing a son? But I have given him that son that you promised to him, in our old age.’

The Lord smiled at Sarah and then down at Abraham still cuddling his son.

‘You have always listened to me and believed what I have said to you. You left your home in Ur of the Chaldees and travelled with your flocks and servants to this land, your promised land. You have circumcised your servants and yourself and on the eighth day you will circumcise your son as well. You will become the great and mighty nation that I have promised you, and this son of yours is just the beginning.’