

**New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio**



*15th Century icon of Abraham with the Angels
by Andrei Rublev*

**A Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost
June 14, 2026**

The Rev Barbara Bond

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7

The Grand Story

There are lots of ways to build a family. We have built a family through the merger of two former parishes, with long memories intact from both, and 25 years of relationships that are still building. We have welcomed many new faces, have said goodbye to dear friends, we have rejoiced at births and baptisms, and celebrated those who have moved on to their next lives. We have received many folks from other communities of faith, who have joined in our particular place of New Life.

Likewise, a biological family goes through many changes, with additions and subtractions. New babies enlarge the genealogical family tree. Adoptions graft on new members. Marriages meld different traditions and join different tribes. New generations are more than the old ones, in number and in relationships.

God knows all of this and says it is good. Different peoples have different ways of relating to God and telling their own story. For us and our tradition, we embrace the ancient story of the Jews. They, and we, call the Jews “God’s chosen People,” who carry on an unbroken story leading to the salvation of the human race. From Christianity’s point of view, the Jewish story makes it about half way, and the trail is picked up in the person of Jesus Christ, who, with his followers, brings a story of faith, hope and love to mold our beliefs and actions, bringing meaning to our lives. We feel we are continuing the Grand Story begun with the story of Abraham.

And so, let us pick up the story of Abraham that we began last week. God told Abraham and his wife Sarah to move, and they did. God told them they would be the parents of a mighty nation, and they are still waiting on that. God has promised Abraham as many descendants as the stars in heaven. This glorious genealogy will be God’s Chosen People, with Abraham as the Patriarch, the first of a long line.

There’s just one problem. Abraham’s wife Sarah is barren. These two chosen parents are having a hard time getting the genealogy started. They are already in their 90s, and they have been trucking around in the desert for a long time, with no children running around in the tent. They haven’t given up exactly, but they are starting to wonder. It is time for a sign of encouragement, for a message from God. The message comes to Abraham and Sarah at their encampment at the Oaks of Mamre.

Three visitors arrive at the tent, and Abraham offers them lavish hospitality. The visitors bring a very welcome message: they announce twice that Sarah will have a son. Sarah thinks this is hilarious and laughs about it – at her age, she had long ago given up hope. But we know that this birth indeed comes to pass: Sarah does indeed give birth a year later, and she and Abraham name their son Isaac, which means laughter. Ha ha! The

joke is on us! Isaac becomes the necessary connection, to get the Jewish genealogy rolling.

You may recall that Abraham and Sarah did indeed question God's intent, and they chose to second-guess God, by employing a surrogate mother to continue Abraham's line. She was a servant in their home, named Hagar, and she did indeed give birth to Abraham's son Ishmael, before Sarah became a mother. We will hear more of that story next week.

We know that Abraham and Sarah represent all the Jews, not just one couple. All the Jews moved from the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, and all of them settled in the Negev desert. All the Jews tell these stories, to remember their own heritage. Lots of times the genealogy almost stops. Apparently, the Jews had a lot of challenges in their history, and this is one way to illustrate those challenges.

Let us return to the scene of the three visitors. There is a famous icon of the three visitors, presented as angels (Angels are, after all, messengers of God). The icon was first written by a 15th century Russian iconographer, Andrei Rublev, who was an Orthodox Christian monk. A copy of the icon is on your bulletin cover, and on our altar. Three angels are seated at a low table, on which is a minimal repast (perhaps representing the Eucharist). On the front of the table is a small opening, a passageway, perhaps representing how tenuous the beginning of this story was, in the person of Abraham's son Isaac.

We are off on a wonderful adventure, the beginning of the family of God's chosen people, to which we also lay claim. The story is rich and exciting, with lots of plot twists and interesting characters. We will recognize the stories from our own early encounters, perhaps from Sunday School lessons; and we will recognize some of the choices made as similar to our own life experience. It is God's Grand Story, and we are a part of it. Thanks be to God!