**Wednesday 9:30am 1st July, 2020**

In Genesis 12 3 God’s promise to Abraham. "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

**Introduction**

Israel’s greatness would be not in herself, but in the God who was active in her history to overcome the confusion, disharmony and sinfulness. But there was a major obstacle barring the door to the future. Abraham had no son. And yet God renewed his promise to Abraham. How could it be? His wife Sarah was barren, and he very old. Faith needed more evidence, Neither did she believe, so Sarah took things in her own hands urging Abraham to have a child by her Egyptian maid, Hagar, and they named him Ishmael.

Then the announcement to Abraham, that his wife Sarah in her old age would conceive and have a son, and name him Isaac.

And here in Genesis 21:1-2 the birth of Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah’s old age, is reported..

**Genesis 21:8-21**

As a young man Ishmael must have been upset and aggrieved that Abraham’s newly born son by Sarah would deprive him of being Abraham’s heir. One day Sarah saw the son Ishmael that Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, poking fun at her two year old son, Isaac. She told Abraham, "Get rid of this slave woman and her son,".This situation gave great pain to Abraham. It was a heart-wrenching dilemma.

We can imagine that Abraham would have prayed asking God what to do. Surely the loving God he had grown to know would not ask him to push Ishmael out of his home into the surrounding wilderness.

God however knew He must protect Isaac’s life and at the same time save Ishmael. whom he loved too and enable him to prosper.

This vivid and appealing story of Hagar and her son Ishmael is not just about individuals and their adventures - they were created and later written down because of ethnicity - a word with a sinister ring for us.

In those days Israel had, to the west the Great Sea and to the east hostile tribes or nations - Amon, Moab, Edom and also Ishmaelites. It is possible that the stories grew up so as to discredit them, or to make it clear they were outside God’s covenant. which was with his chosen people Israel.

Indeed it is a possible way to fear the story of Hagar and Ishmael and be left with these thoughts about the way human beings deal with each other, the way we can be led astray through the clever manipulation of fear and hatred that people sense they feel - the dark side in us.

For us the Ishmaelites are not a national enemy, nor a threat to our well-being. Whoever they were, has been lost in the mists of time, and we are left with a bible story about Abraham and Hagar, the maid whom his wife Sarah introduced into his bed to conceive the child Sarah couldn’t have; her own eventual child Isaac and the boy Hagar had first produced and who in Sarah’s jealous eyes represented a threat to his succession.

Abraham gave food and water to Hagar and Ishmael and sent them out into the wilderness ‘to face what would be certain death’.

Genesis 21:17-21 When Hagar got lost in the desert and she and her son Ishmael nearly died of thirst, it was God himself, not Abraham, who came to their rescue,

Out in the wilderness Hagar sobs. the skin of water was empty, Abraham’s bread is eaten and God comes to her via an angel and intervenes revealing a well of water.

**Reflection**

Here is great symbolism, Death is to the old life; for Hagar this was being a slave in Abraham’s household and for Ishmael not the true son. Gratefully Hagar sees, at the angel’s bidding, a well of water, and from that well comes new life. From potential death comes new life for the child who grows up to found his own tribe. Ishmael could not be the child of the promise, but God was deeply concerned for Hagar and her non-Israelite child. Moreover, Ishmael found his place in history. He is regarded by Muslims as the ancestor of the Arabs -.a formidable Bedouin, strong in every way.

This life transcends the old one - a life now of freedom from the constraints of slavery, a life for Ishmael of growing competence in the skills demanded of him.

Where was that cycle broken?

For Ishmael and Hagar it is at the well of life-giving water in the desert; for Christians it is at the baptismal font, the cleansing from sin and the gift of new life.

Indeed, Hagar’s desert was a literal one. Ours are often deserts of the mind or heart. Those desert times in our life are times when we may feel expendable, or we become oblivious of our gifts from God. Or when we feel anxious or bereft and needmore than anything to hear God’s voice. In those times God’s presence is required to open our eyes so that we can see the well that contains the water of consolation, mercy and assurance.

**Collect for St. Peter and St. Paul (29th June)**

Almighty God, whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified thee in their death as in their life:

grant that thy Church, inspired by their teaching and example, and made one by thy Spirit,

may ever stand firm on the one foundation which is thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

**Prayers** for those who are ill, for those who have recently died

For those who are anxious and fearful, for the coming days and the steps taking us forward through this pandemic, for people across the world and all who live in crowded cities. In crowded accommodation with no green and open spaces nearby, for families living in threatening circumstances. We pray for those who govern here and across every nation, for all who give wise advice in leadership and in scientific knowledge to help us and give us confidence.

We give thanks for our families and friends, for our church and the faithful ministry, Sunnyside and Bourne End, for the commitment of the whole team leading us forward in worship, We pray and give thanks for Rebecca’s steady recovery and our grateful love for her ministry and leadership among us.

**The Beatitudes**, Let us pray:

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for mercy shall be shown to them.

Blessed are the ;pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Amen