

## BELOVED SONS

a dramatic reading appropriate for Lent or Passion Week

[ 3 voices ]

### Introductory Note

Genesis chapter 22 gives the account of the 'Binding of Isaac' where God asks Abraham to make a ritual sacrifice of his only son, Isaac. The conventional understanding of this event is that God is testing the faith of Abraham, and once Abraham proves his obedience, God rewards Abraham by sparing his son.

During the Second Temple period [which included the time of Jesus], the figure of Isaac was portrayed as taking an active role in the event, a role critical as that of Abraham. Isaac was seen as a fully obedient son, a willing sacrifice compliant to God's will. The 'Binding' was as much a test of the faith of Isaac as it was a test of his father. The resistance or disobedience of either would have had disastrous consequences for the Jewish people. But their obedience assured God's blessing for generations to come

There are many indications that Jesus was understood as a 'new Isaac.' These points of comparison are most evident in Matthew's Gospel, and there are also hints throughout the Pauline Letters.

The following are the main comparisons:

- Both Jesus and Isaac were promised sons conceived outside the normal course of nature.
- At Jesus' baptism and at the Transfiguration, the Heavenly Voice spoke of Jesus as 'my beloved son', a direct reference to Genesis 22.
- Jesus was portrayed as resolutely obedient to God's will. His willing sacrifice initiated the New Covenant, in the same way that Isaac's obedience assured the Old Covenant.
- The 'Binding of Isaac' and Jesus' passion both took place during the Passover season.
- The willing and active obedience of Jesus and Isaac had salvation consequences for the world.
- Two sons laid down their lives, only to have them given back to them — just as two fathers, who gave up their sons, had them restored.

The most enduring insight I think comes from the first verse of Matthew where the genealogy of Jesus named him as 'Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham.' For those Jews hoping for the appearance of a victorious Messiah who would rescue God's chosen people, naming Jesus as 'Son of David,' the great king, makes good sense. But to also call Jesus 'Son of Abraham' modifies this kingly image. Jesus would be a king, but a king who would be tested and would suffer. To call Jesus 'Son of Abraham' also linked him to God's larger covenant promises to Abraham to form a great people that would bless all nations. The comparison to Isaac was a re-acknowledgement that, even as God's chosen, the way is through submission to God.

And we can wonder, how much did Jesus have Isaac in mind as he approached Jerusalem for a final time, as he broke bread at the Last Supper, as he prayed in Gethsemane?

There are four sections to this reading and I suggest they be marked by a 2 or 3 minute silence or the singing of a verse from a hymn.

'Beloved Sons' was first presented at the Calvin Seminary Chapel during Lent 2011.

Other dramatic readings are available at:  
<http://www.dramaticreadingsforworship.com>

## The Reading

- A Beloved sons
- B Isaac and Jesus
- A Children of promise
- C Born of miraculous birth
- A Beloved sons
- B Both tested  
and marked for death
- C Both fully obedient
- A Given up
- C Given over by their fathers
- B Restored to their fathers
- C Beloved sons  
born to be a blessing to all nations
  
- A Beloved Isaac
- B Child of promise
- A God spoke to Abraham
- C "I will make your name great  
and you will be a blessing  
You will be the father of a multitude of nations  
Through your offspring  
all nations on earth will be blessed.
- A And the promise was a covenant
- C Child of Promise
- B an everlasting covenant between God and Abraham  
and his descendants after him.
  
- C Beloved Jesus
- B Child of promise
- A Matthew called him  
Messiah,
- B son of David,
- C son of Abraham

- A An angel visited Joseph  
engaged to a young maiden
- B "Your wife shall bear a son  
and you will call his name Jesus  
Emmanuel
- C God with us
- B for he will save his people from their sins
- C Child of promise
- B He will be great  
and will be called the Son of the Most High.
- C His kingdom will never end.

[pause]

- C Two sons  
Born of miraculous birth
- A Beloved Isaac
- B Beloved Jesus
  
- C Isaac
- B Beloved Son of the Father
  
- A Abraham was a hundred years old  
when his son was born to him
- B The beloved son's name was Isaac.
- A His mother had been barren
- B without child
- A up to her ninetieth year
- C "Who would have said that Sarah would nurse children?"
- B Barren mother
- A Isaac was born to her  
in her ninetieth year

[pause]

- B Beloved Jesus
- C Born of miraculous birth

A The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said  
C "You will conceive and give birth to a son,  
and you are to call him Jesus."

A Mary asked the angel,  
B "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"  
C "The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.  
So the child to be born will be called holy  
A the Son of God.

B Jesus  
A Beloved Son of the Father

C John declared,  
B "Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."  
A As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.  
At that moment heaven was opened,  
and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.  
And a voice from heaven said,  
C "This is my beloved son,  
B my Isaac,  
C my son whom I love;  
B This is my servant whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom my soul delights.  
I will put my spirit upon him.  
He will bring justice to the nations."

A Jesus  
B Beloved Son of the Father

A After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James,  
and led them up a high mountain by themselves.  
There he was transfigured before them.  
B His face shone like the sun,  
and his clothes became as white as the light.  
A Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.  
And a voice from the cloud said,  
C "This is my Son,  
B my beloved Son;  
C with him I am well pleased."

[ silence ]

C Isaac and Jesus

B Beloved Sons of God

A Both tested  
and marked for death

B Both fully obedient

A The Binding of Isaac

B Beloved Son

A Given over by the father

C It is written in the book of Numbers

“You shall give to the Lord the first-born among your sons”

A It was at the coming time of the Passover  
And God tested Abraham.

B “Abraham! Take your son,  
your only son whom you love

C Isaac

B and go to the region of Moriah,

C to the mountain where Solomon will build the Holy Temple

B Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.”

C It is written in the Book of Numbers

“You shall give to the Lord the first-born among your sons”

A Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey.  
He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac.  
Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham,

C “Father, the fire and wood are here,  
but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

A Abraham answered,

B “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

A When they reached the place God had told him about,  
Abraham bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar.

C “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.”

A Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

A Beloved Son  
B Restored to the father

A But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven,  
B "Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay a hand on the boy".  
Now I know that you fear God,  
because you have done this and have not withheld your son,  
C your only son.  
B I will surely bless you  
and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky  
and as the sand on the seashore.  
C Through your offspring  
all nations on earth will be blessed,  
because you have obeyed me.  
I will keep you  
and will make you to be a covenant for the people  
B and a light for the Gentiles."  
A Abraham looked up  
and there in a thicket he saw a ram behind him caught by its horns.  
He went over and took the ram  
and sacrificed it as a burnt offering  
C instead of his son.  
  
A By faith Abraham,  
when God tested him,  
B offered Isaac as a sacrifice.  
A Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead,  
and so in a manner of speaking  
C he did receive Isaac back from death.

[ silence ]

A In the time of the Second Temple  
Isaac was well known  
in the understanding of the Jewish people.  
As it is written in the Antiquities of Josephus:  
C "Now Isaac was of such generous disposition  
that suited the son of such a father  
that he was pleased with what his father told him  
So he went immediately to the altar to be sacrificed."

- A As it is written in a Qumran text:  
 B "Bind my hands," he cried.  
 "Tie me well, so that I may not struggle in the anguish of my soul  
 and be thrown into the pit of destruction  
 and cause a blemish to be found in your offering."  
 A As it is written in the First Letter of Clement:  
 C "Isaac gladly allowed himself  
 to be brought forward as a sacrifice,  
 confident in the knowledge of what was about to happen."  
 A As it is written in the Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum:  
 B "Through Isaac the peoples will understand  
 that the Lord has deemed the soul of man worthy to be a sacrifice."  
 A The testing of Abraham was also the testing of Isaac  
 C And both proved obedient  
 B to the salvation of those who came after them.

[pause]

- B Jesus  
 C Tested  
 and marked for death  
 B And fully obedient
- A Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness  
 to be tested by the devil.  
 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.  
 The tempter came to him and said,  
 B "If you are the Son of God,  
 tell these stones to become bread."  
 C "If you are the Son of God,  
 throw yourself down from the temple."  
 B "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world,  
 if you will bow down and worship me."  
 A Jesus said to him,  
 C "Away from me, Satan!"  
 A Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.



- A Jesus, Beloved Son  
 C Delivered up by the father
- A From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law.  
 C "As you know, the Passover is two days away — and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified, and the third day he will be raised."  
 B Then the chief priests and the elders of the people schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.
- A Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee further along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them,  
 C "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."  
 B Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed,  
 C "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."  
 A Then he returned to the disciples and said to them,  
 C "Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

[pause]

- B The Binding of Jesus  
 A Beloved Son  
 B Given over by the Father
- A It is written in the book of Numbers  
 "You shall give to the Lord the first-born among your sons"

- C When they came to the place that is called Golgotha  
they crucified Jesus there with the criminals  
Those who passed by hurled insults at him,
- A "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days,  
save yourself!  
Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"
- C "He saved others, but he can't save himself!"
- B "He's the king of Israel!  
Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him."
- A "He trusts in God.  
Let God rescue him now if he wants him,  
for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

[ silence ]

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B Both tested  
and marked for death  
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A Given up  
C Given over by their fathers  
B Restored to their fathers  
C Beloved sons  
A Both a light to the Gentiles  
C Through whom  
all nations on earth are blessed
- B After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many.
- C He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted,  
because he poured out his life unto death.

A What, then, shall we say in response to these things?  
B If God is for us, who can be against us?  
He who did not spare his own Son,  
C For God so loved the world  
B but delivered him  
gave him up for us all  
C that he gave  
delivered up his only begotten son  
B —how will he not also,  
along with him graciously give us all things?  
C that whoever believes on him will not perish  
but have everlasting life

A For Christ,  
C Messiah, our Passover lamb,  
A has been sacrificed.

A Understand, then,  
that those who have faith are children  
of Abraham.  
B Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,  
and announced the gospel in advance  
to Abraham:  
C “All nations will be blessed through you.”  
A So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham,  
the man of faith.  
B Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law  
by becoming a curse for us.

C He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham  
might be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus,  
A so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

ABC Thanks be to God.