

**God comes to us...**  
**Sermon on Genesis 18: 1-15**

In the heat of noon Abraham is sitting in front of his tent to rest in the shade.

He is tired, and his thoughts go here and there.

Deep in his heart there is this pain that he and Sara don't have a child – in spite of all the great promises.

All of a sudden three men appear: strangers, tired from the journey, dust on their feet...

Abraham could have sent the guests away, after all he was tired and not at all in the mood to welcome visitors.

Had he done so, he would have missed the most important day of his life, and everything would forever have remained the same: his every day life, his worries, the wound in his heart.

This is how it begins when we meet God.

In the middle of the day, right in the midst of life – and we hardly notice.

Often we are far too busy with ourselves, our work, our hurts, our fears...

Abraham decides to welcome the strangers.

Could he have known?

Does he feel that this encounter will change his whole life?

It was a tradition in ancient times to show hospitality to strangers.

You didn't let them stand at the door or walk by.

Abraham sees the strangers, he pays attention to them, he invites them, he offers water for their dirty feet, the shade of the trees, food and drink...

Abraham lets the guests in and they stay.

That's the way it goes, when God comes to visit us.

Is there a more beautiful image at the end of the year, just before the New Year begins, than that of God visiting us?

He comes in quietly, unrecognised - standing there on the road of our life waiting. Unexpectedly he crosses our path:

with tired feet, and worn out clothes, searching for an apartment, and without valid papers.

He has no visa, or no friend, no success in school...

And if we look with Abraham's eyes, he will come to us and make our whole life appear in a totally different light.

Everyday life is the place where God meets us:

we offer a piece of bread to the stranger – and God comes to us.

We listen to a friend in despair – and God comes to us.

We help with maths or the payment for a passport – and God comes to us.

Long before we look for God, he is already on his way to us.

He wants to enter our lives, he needs our eyes to see, our hearts to feel, and our hands to work...

God is coming to us, and turns our life into a feast.

What a promising picture for our time together tonight and our life in the New Year.

As soon as the men had accepted Abraham's invitation, he starts preparing a big meal. Milk needs to be served, butter, a roast and a cake.

The guests eat and are glad.

Another image of God is coming into our lives:

God enjoying himself, celebrating, with delicious food and pretty clothes, with wine and dance and joy and laughter.

God is coming.

He wants to be right there in the centre of our life:

when we eat we worship,

when we laugh we pray,

when we dance we praise.

However: when God invites us to celebrate the feast of life, he does not invite us to do this for our own sake, but for God's sake.

We shall worship God and worship the God who comes to us in our neighbours. We shall celebrate and share with those who need it.

Then God will fill our lives with a glow that we never experienced before.

This could actually be enough for New Year's Eve, couldn't it?

But our story still goes on.

The best part is still to come.

“I will return in due season,” says the first of those mysterious strangers,  
“then Sara shall have a son…”

This unbelievable message is the answer to Abraham’s hospitality.  
Their life is turned into a celebration that opens doors for a miracle beyond  
all expectations.

When God enters our life, everything can be made new!  
All our desires and all our fears can then be seen in the light of God’s loving  
care.

What had seemed almost insignificant did in the end touch Abraham’s and  
Sara’s deepest emotions:

God touches the trauma of their childlessness.

He lays his healing hands on the wound of disappointment.

He does this for Abraham and Sara.

And he does it for us, too.

God wants to touch our wounds and heal them:

the marks of a difficult childhood,

the deep fear of punishment,

the love of partners that has grown cold,

the years on the run…

Abraham and Sara had been living in the autumn of their life.

They had to face up to the fact that God’s great promise would not come  
true. Sometimes in the nights Sara still wept quietly, and Abraham – the  
man that he was – swallowed his tears and fell silent.

Sometimes some dreams must die to enable people to carry on…

All of a sudden this stranger comes and awakens the dream that had almost  
been forgotten.

He speaks out loud what Sara and Abraham had no longer dared to say.

And Sara laughs.

It is the bitter laughter of a woman who’d been hurt by life, who had  
become bright but also harsh.

And then the name of God is mentioned in the conversation.

Pain turns into hope.

Scepticism into deep joy of life.

At the end of the story there is laughter.

Issac, that is how Abraham names the child, means “he laughs” or “God laughs”. And three chapters later Sara says: “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” (21v6)

May we be able to laugh with Sara –  
not secretly at the entrance of the tent,  
but freely and genuinely with others laughing with us.  
May God laugh in our lives, and may we laugh with him.  
May God come to us and turn our life into a feast.

That’s what we can wish for us tonight – at the end of the old, and at the beginning of the New Year..

God is coming to us.  
In the stranger who we invite.  
In the bread we share.  
In the smile we give.  
Amen.