

Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:5-14; Psalm 87

This past Sunday's World Church Sunday focussed on how we can reach the nations here in Oxford. Given how many in East Oxford are Muslims, it is worth us thinking about points of connection and challenge with these neighbours of ours.

By way of review, see if you can recall why Abraham is a particularly compelling figure for:

-Iraqis¹

-Residents of Turkey, esp Kurds²

-Palestinians in the West Bank³

1. Abraham the Friend of God

Muslims talk about Ibrahim Khalil, meaning Abraham the Friend of God.

-why might Muslims feel he deserves that title?

-why does the Bible say he was given that title?

James 2:23 "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend."

2. Abram, Exalted Father ('Big Daddy')

Abram was 75 when he left Haran, and he had to wait til he was 100 before he finally received the promised son.

For us the promise is that the offspring of Abraham will continue to multiply as we preach the gospel. What areas of church life suffer, do you think, when we lack faith?

3. Abraham, Father of a Multitude ('Global Daddy')

After the birth of Ishmael, in Gen 17:5, God changes Abram's name to Abraham, "for I will make you the father of many nations"

Muslims believe Ishmael and Abraham went to Mecca and rebuilt the Ka'aba.

Therefore observant Muslims:

1) pray each day five times towards Mecca,

2) do their ritual prayers in Arabic,

3) and aim to go on an (expensive) pilgrimage to Arabia at least once in their lives.

How is a biblical understanding of being 'a son or daughter of Abraham' more liberating than Islam's vision?

Psalm 87 reflects on God's covenant by picturing the inclusion of surrounding nations in Zion. We sang it immediately after the sermon (see below; sing it again if you like!) to help us internalise the hope of Gen 12:3 (all the clans of the earth being blessed through Abraham)

How do you think it felt for OT Jews to sing this song about Egypt, Babylon, Philistia etc being counted as born in Zion?

¹ Abraham born in Ur, S Iraq

² Abraham moved to Haran, a Kurdish city in SE Turkey, where Abraham's Fishpond is the major tourist site

³ Abraham and Sarah are buried at Hebron, known in Arabic as Khalil.

What might it mean for a nation to sing and celebrate that “all my fountains are in you [either Zion or God himself; this amounts to the same]”?

How has Jesus, the Son of Abraham, blessed Britain as a nation over the centuries?
[think schools, hospitals, the rule of law, free speech]

Discussion Questions at the end of the service:

Do you find it easy or difficult to get to know neighbours from other countries?

Has the sermon from Abraham persuaded you that Christianity has anything unique to offer?

If you're persuaded that the Good News of Jesus is for everyone, mention one or two people you can get to know better, esp people from other nations, and perhaps begin to discuss something from the Bible.

Psalm 87 (from *Sing Psalms*- tune for Come Thou Fount works well)

- 1 On Jerus'lem's holy mountain
 he has founded his abode.
- 2 More than all of Jacob's dwellings
 Zion's gates are dear to God.
- 3 Glorious things of you are spoken,
 Zion, city of the LORD:
- 4 “Many drawn from all the nations
 as your people I record.

 “I will name as those who know me
 Egypt, Tyre and Babylon;
 Philistine along with Cushite
 I will count as Zion-born.”
- 5 Yes, it will be said of Zion,
 “This and that one here belong;
 And on her the Highest's blessing
 will descend, and make her strong.”
- 6 “Born in Zion,” God will enter
 in the peoples' register.
- 7 They will sing, as they make music,
 “All my fountains are in her.”

(Doxology)

Glory be to Christ our Saviour—
 long-awaited hopes have come!
He has gathered us to Zion;
 We're washed clean in Jesus' blood.