

ADVENT 3  
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
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**THIS IS MY BELOVED SON:  
ABSALOM, THE REBELLIOUS SON  
(Genesis 16:1-14)**

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God our Father and from Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

In our two previous Advent meditations, we have considered two sons that were huge disappointments to their parents: Cain, who was the first murderer, and Ishmael, who was an illegitimate son. When we say that a son, or any child for that matter, is a disappointment to their parents, we don't mean that the parents don't love them. Of course parents love their children. Parents make many sacrifices for their children. When a baby comes along, the needs and desires of mom and dad take a back seat. Parents will sacrifice time, money, and sleep in order to provide the very best for their children. Sacrifices come in all sizes. A dad might sacrifice the last bite of his favorite dessert and give it to his child who loves it just as much. A mom might give up a career because that is what is best for her children. And I don't know of any parent who would not be willing to sacrifice their own life in order to save the life of their child. Nearly every parent would be willing to take the place of their child if they are suffering. But we don't always get that chance.

David, the father of Absalom, wished that he could have died in his son's place. But the story of this father and son

ultimately points us to the love of our heavenly Father and the ultimate sacrifice He made so that we can be saved from the curse of death.

The account told in 2 Samuel chapters 13–18 reveals the wickedness and depravity of human nature—even those chosen by God to be His special people, a light to the nations. This event is every bit as harsh as news reports from our own day: people, even God’s people, committing acts of incest, rape, injustice, murder, scheming, rebellion, and war!

The heartache and misery of David’s life all comes together in 2 Samuel 18:9, 29-33

*(ESV) 9 Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going... 29 The king asked, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” Ahimaaz answered, “I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king’s servant and me, your servant, but I don’t know what it was.” 30 The king said, “Stand aside and wait here.” So he stepped aside and stood there. 31 Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The Lord has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.” 32 The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.” 33 The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he*

*went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"*

Here's the quick recap of the situation that led to what is relayed to us in these verses: King David had nineteen sons from several different wives – itself a reminder of how distorted God's intent regarding marriage can become. Amnon was the first-born son of David and was in line to be king.

In this corrupted version of marriage, Amnon lusted after his half-sister, Tamar. He faked being sick so that he could be cared for by her. When they were alone, he forced himself upon her. Then he placed the blame on her and sent her away to hide in shame.

When King David heard of this, he was angry, but he did nothing to punish Amnon. Absalom, who was the full brother of Tamar, was infuriated with Amnon and angry at David for not pursuing justice for Tamar. For two years, Absalom hated and plotted against Amnon until eventually, Absalom had Amnon murdered. Then Absalom fled and exiled himself. What a mess!

Jump ahead three years. Joab, the captain of King David's army, convinces David to bring back Absalom because David was depressed because he missed Absalom. But when Absalom returned to Jerusalem, he still had revenge in mind. Obviously, he had not yet forgiven his father. Using his natural good looks (the Bible describes him as very handsome with his long hair) and his charisma,

Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel by having debates with the leaders of Jerusalem during which he spoke badly of David while promoting himself. Absalom did this for four years until one day he left Jerusalem and sent secret messengers, who announced, "Absalom is king in Hebron!" Thousands of Israelites rallied to him and joined the rebellion because of all the patient, hard work he had done to build up his reputation.

David decided leave Jerusalem in order to spare the citizens there a battle when Absalom moved in to take the throne. David summoned those loyal to himself and amassed a great army. As the battle drew near, David stayed behind but instructed his army to deal gently with Absalom for David's sake. He still loved his son and wanted to show him mercy.

On the day of battle, David's army soundly defeated Absalom's force. As Absalom attempted to escape in the forest, his mule went under the thick branches of a tree, and his head was caught in the tree so that he was left hanging. When Joab found him, he ignored the words of David and threw three javelins into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the tree.

The reporting of this news and David's response is what we heard in our reading today. When he heard of Absalom's death, David wept and said, *"O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"* Here ends this tragic father-son story.

It is a story not unlike the story we share with our heavenly Father. And sadly, that identifies us in the person of Absalom, the rebellious son... but surely you aren't that bad! You have never murdered anyone or incited rebellion or anything like that. You might think that the only thing you have in common with Absalom is your good looks, but while we look at outward actions, God looks at the heart. And in your heart, you are just as rotten and sinful and rebellious as Absalom and as every other character portrayed in this story. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person (Matthew 15:19–20, emphasis added).

Like Absalom, you rebel against your heavenly Father each and every day when you put yourself on the throne of your heart and attempt to run your own life. Unlike David, God is a perfect Father, and He has told you what is good and right. But in your selfish pride, you have chosen not to listen and have declared war on God's will. A son of the king with privilege and power, Absalom decided that it wasn't enough. He wanted to be king. And we desire the same thing. Whenever we break any of the Ten Commandments, we also break the first one by placing our own desires above God's will.

God identified Absalom as someone who was cursed for his sin by allowing him to hang from that tree. God's Law declares in Deuteronomy 21: "A hanged man is cursed by God." You deserve the same punishment for your rebellion. Because of your sin, you are cursed and should expect the wrath of God.

Yet out of His great love, God sent Jesus, the true Son of David, to become a curse for you by hanging from a tree in order to make you an heir of His heavenly kingdom. Far more than David, God is a merciful king who does not want you to die, despite your rebellion against Him. For you, God cries out like David, “O My children, My children! Would I had died instead of you, O My children!” But in God’s case, He carried out the substitution that David could only hope for. In order to save you from the curse of death, God willingly gave up His only Son. The Son of God also became the Son of Man—the true Son of David, in whom no sin or rebellion could be found, to carry out God’s promise that David’s kingdom would be established forever.

And as the Son of David, Jesus also hung from a tree—the cross—and a spear was thrust into Him. Paul refers back to Deuteronomy 21 and connects it to the cross in Galatians 3:13 where he writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse. For it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs from a tree.” Jesus became cursed for you. He died the death you deserved. He who knew no sin became sin for you so that you might receive His righteousness.

That’s the sacrifice your heavenly Father was willing to make for you, His rebellious child. No matter how far you stray, no matter how violently you rebel, no matter how often you attempt to remove Him from the throne of your heart, God will always love you and is ready to forgive you for the sake of the One who hung on the tree in your place. Through Jesus, the true Son of David and King of the

universe, you are a forgiven and eternally loved child of God, and you have a place in His kingdom forever. Amen.