

## THE COVENANT WITH ABRAM Gn 15,1-21

### Prayer

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! <sup>5</sup> Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. <sup>7</sup> Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. <sup>8</sup> Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates. <sup>10</sup> "When the LORD, your God, brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that he would give you, a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, <sup>11</sup> with houses full of goods of all sorts that you did not garner, with cisterns that you did not dig, with vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant; and when, therefore, you eat your fill, <sup>12</sup> take care not to forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. /Dt 6,4-12/

### Introduction

One of the most frequently asked questions is "how much?": How much does it cost, how much do I pay, how much time, energy, effort do I have to put in? When God gives His promises, they are unconditioned; there is no "how much" people have to give for the promises. It is not a merit on humanity's side but God who in His free decision grants and brings His promises to fulfillment.

Abram needed many repetitions in order to understand this logic. It was a long exercise for him that enabled him to answer with faith. He "put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness". The text about the covenant with Abram (Gn 15,1-21) will be the object of our meditation today.

### Text

Some time after these events, this word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great." <sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what good will your gifts be, if I keep on being childless and have as my heir the steward of my house, Eliezer?" <sup>3</sup> Abram continued, "See, you have given me no offspring, and so one of my servants will be my heir." <sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: "No, that one shall not be your heir; your own issue shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said: "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, "shall your descendants be." <sup>6</sup> Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> He then said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession." <sup>8</sup> "O Lord GOD," he asked, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" <sup>9</sup> He answered him, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon." <sup>10</sup> He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up. <sup>11</sup> Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram stayed with them. <sup>12</sup> As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him. <sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to Abram: "Know for certain that your descendants shall be aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation they must serve, and in the end they will depart with great wealth. <sup>15</sup> You, however, shall join your forefathers in peace; you shall be buried at a contented old age. <sup>16</sup> In the fourth time-span the others shall come back here; the wickedness of the Amorites will not have reached its full measure until then." <sup>17</sup> When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking brazier and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces. <sup>18</sup> It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River (the Euphrates), <sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

## Structure

The limits of this episode are clearly set with the introductory words “after these events”. It is a continuation of Abram’s story and what is referred to is Gn 14 and Abram’s victory over local kings, the liberation of Lot and Abram’s own possession and his encounter with Melchizedech. Several allusions in Gn 15 to the previous chapter confirm that these are the things referred to.

The episode reaches its climax in vv. 18-21 in the list of the ten peoples inhabiting the Promised Land in Abraham’s lifetime. At the same time they define the great extent of the Promised Land.

The episode can be divided into two units with a similar structure:

- A. Revelation and promise (1-6)
- B. Sacrifice (7-21)

Yahweh’s word	Promise of reward 1	Promise of land 7
Abram’s word	Complaint about childlessness 2-3	Guarantee requested 8
Yahweh’s reaction	Promise of heir 4	Oath rite commanded 9
Public act	Taken into open 5	Oath rite carried out 16-17
Yahweh’s word	Promise of descendants 5	Promise of land for descendants 13-16
Conclusion	Abram’s faith 6	Yahweh’s covenant 18 - 21

## Lectio

**1. Some time after these events, this word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great."**

The first unit is introduced by the words: “Some time after these events”. This is a common introductory formula in narrations: “Some time after these events, God put Abraham to the test” (22,1). It indicates that a certain amount of time has elapsed since the previous episode. The singular events are related and create a large cycle.

That’s why there are several allusions to Gn 14, f. e. the words “I am your shield”. Abram has already experienced this protection in his fight against the kings in order to liberate Lot and to recover his possession! Melchizedek says the following words: “And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (**Gn 14,20**). David calls God in his struggles against his enemies with similar words: “my God, my rock of refuge! My shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold, my refuge, my savior, from violence you keep me safe” (**2Sam 22,3 = Psalm 18,3** “LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, my saving horn, my stronghold!”). God reveals himself across the Bible as the one who protects people.

God speaks to Abram as to a prophet: “word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision”. There are cases of similar revelation to prophets: “The word of the LORD that came to Hosea” (**Hos 1,1**). Abram receives his revelation in a dream/vision which is also a prophetic event. Abram himself will later be called prophet: “Therefore, return the man's wife-- as a spokesman he will intercede for you-- that your life may be saved” (**Gn 20,7**). This aspect helps to understand the prophecy about the Egyptian slavery in vv. 13-16.

God encourages Abram not to be afraid, which is a very common phrase in the OT, frequently introducing an oracle of salvation (e.g., **Isa 7,4; 10,24**). These words used to be addressed to special people elected for great things: (Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, Mary...). Abram too, could be seen as a military warrior (see the “shield” motive!). God is the shield of his faithful people and particularly the protector of the king.

**2. But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what good will your gifts be, if I keep on being childless and have as my heir the steward of my house, Eliezer?"**

Abram speaks to God for the first time. Until now, only God was speaking to Abram. We know from the previous narration that Sarah has been barren and Abram has been given a promise of descendants (“I will make of you a great nation” **12,2,7; 13,16**). Being childless was shame/grief, since the family doesn’t continue: “Thus says the LORD: Write this man down as one childless, who will never thrive in his lifetime! No descendant of his shall achieve a seat on the throne of David as ruler again over Judah” (**Jer 22,30**). Divine blessing leads to being fruitful and multiplying: “God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply” (**1,28; 9,1**). Childlessness was often considered a punishment from God, but it can also be an occasion for God to show his miraculous acting: (birth of Gideon, Samuel, Jesus).

“. . . the steward of my house, Eliezer?” The most probable meaning is that this is a hint at Eliezer’s background: it is a complaint that the foreigner Eliezer (from Damascus) will usurp Abram’s house, (considered almost like stealing of property) compared to a strong desire to keep family property.

**3. Abram continued, "See, you have given me no offspring, and so one of my servants will be my heir."**

“. . . one of my servants” = son of my house; OT defines a person as son of his father. Eliezer is not said to be a slave, but simply a member of the household. Most probably this is a hint at adoption that was possible in those times and cultures. The adopted person would be expected to fulfill the function of son during the lifetime of his master: look after the adopter in his old age, bury him and could then expect the inheritance. If the adopter subsequently had children, the adopted “child” could not be totally disinherited, but would share the inheritance.

Heir and heritage usually refers to Israel’s taking possession of the Land which has been received free as a gift from God who is like a father to his people.

**4. Then the word of the LORD came to him: "No, that one shall not be your heir; your own issue shall be your heir."**

This divine word gives an answer to Abram’s concerns. It is emphasized that a real son will inherit from him: “your own issue” = who comes out of your lap (usually means woman’s womb or in general the trunk of body, belly as the seat of reproduction). In other words, Abraham will have a real son, not simply a legal heir. A similar promise is given to David: “And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm” (**2Sam 7,12**): the story of Abram is related to the story of David.

**5. "He took him outside and said: "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, "shall your descendants be.""**

The star-parallel (together with the sands of the seashore) is used several times in the Abraham cycle promising descendants: “I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore” (**22,17**). This promise passed on the whole nation as the heir of the promises to Abram: “The LORD, your God, has so multiplied you that

you are now as numerous as the stars in the sky” (**Deut 1,10**). The idea behind this is that heaven and the stars are symbols of God’s power. The same metaphor (stars standing for a high number) can be found in ancient sources from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome.

**6. “Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.”**

After God’s and Abram’s words, the narrator’s comment follows. Abram’s silence showed his faith in the promises just made to him. The verbal form of “he put his faith/he believed” stands for repeated or continuing action: Faith is Abram’s usual response to the Lord’s revelation.

The Hebrew expression for faith includes the meaning of building upon a strong foundation and firm basis; putting trust in it. Why is Abram’s faith noted here in a particular way? It is not a theoretical knowledge about God’s existence, but rather a practical and concrete moment of trust in Him. The word of promise had come in a crisis situation (after the battle of Gn 14) and it serves as a reminder of Abram’s attitude to God, which should be a model for all his descendants. In this sense, Abram’s experiences are archetypal for later generations: Just as he exercised faith in God’s revelation, so too must his offspring exercise faith in their situation by obediently carrying out God’s will declared in the law.

“. . . as an act of righteousness” Righteousness within the Pentateuch always applies to human activity: not what God gives them as an extraneous state, but their human action (what man has done = **his** faith) is intended. We might think on Abram’s intercession for the people of Sodom: “if I find fifty innocent (=righteous, just) people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake” (**Gn 18,25**). Intended is human righteousness. Similarly, Noah was saved from destruction in the flood because he was righteous “Then the LORD said to Noah: “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for you alone in this age have I found to be truly just” (**Gn 7,1**).

Righteousness here doesn’t consist in doing / performing any particular actions. His faith is being counted for righteousness. Faith is the right response to God’s revelation as it is exemplified in the rest of the story: it leads to righteous actions: “I have singled him out that he may direct his sons and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD may carry into effect for Abraham the promises he made about him” (**Gn 18,19**).

This motive of righteousness is developed by Paul in his teaching about justification, especially in Rom 4 and Gal 3. A further elaboration is offered in Jam 2.

**7. “He then said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession”**

The second unit also starts with a divine promise. The exact wording is a formula used in other texts: “I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery” (**Ex 20,2**).

God’s promises are repeated and after the promise of heir in the 1<sup>st</sup> unit, the promise of land from Gn 12 is duplicated here.

God refers to himself as Yahweh (the Lord) in this case (there are only four such cases in Gn). It is Yahweh who called Abram at the beginning and who will lead Israel out of Egypt “God spoke further to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. “This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations” (**Ex 3,15**). The exodus story will be hinted at in vv. 11-18. Bringing from Ur of the Chaldeans is a reference to Gn 12 and the call of Abram.

Yahweh is God’s personal name, compared to the general name “God” that stands for deity. A rabbinic commentary says that “Yahweh” contains the aspect of mercy, while “God” expresses his righteousness.

**8. “O Lord GOD," he asked, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?"”**

This surprising statement (after v. 6 where he put his faith in the Lord) has to be seen as a part of the parallel structure (the same opening formula “O Lord GOD” as in the petition in v. 2). After Gn 12 it seemed clear that Abram was convinced about the gift of the country – he left Ur and Haran, walked through Canaan and built altars there.

Asking for a sign doesn't mean lack of faith. It is a normal behavior at God's revelation: “Gideon said to God, “If indeed you are going to save Israel through me, as you promised,<sup>37</sup> I am putting this woolen fleece on the threshing floor. If dew comes on the fleece alone, while all the ground is dry, I shall know that you will save Israel through me, as you promised.”<sup>38</sup> That is what took place. Early the next morning he wrung the dew from the fleece, squeezing out of it a bowlful of water.<sup>39</sup> Gideon then said to God, “Do not be angry with me if I speak once more. Let me make just one more test with the fleece. Let the fleece alone be dry, but let there be dew on all the ground.”<sup>40</sup> That night God did so; the fleece alone was dry, but there was dew on all the ground” (**Judg 6,36–40**). On the contrary, it might be an indication of a lack of faith to refuse an offered sign: “the LORD spoke to Ahaz: <sup>11</sup> Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky! <sup>12</sup> But Ahaz answered, “I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!”<sup>13</sup> Then he said: Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary men, must you also weary my God? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel” (**Is 7,10-14**).

**9. “He answered him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.””**

Three year old animals were considered adult and suitable for sacrifice. Another way to translate the Hebrew text is 3 animals of each kind. The choice of animals here is not random. These animals cover all those species that could have been brought for sacrifice. There is a similarity with the sacrifice of Noah offered after the flood who offered from all the clean animals: “then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and choosing from every clean animal and every clean bird, he offered holocausts on the altar” (**Gn 8,20**). The motive of Covenant with Noah is repeated in the case of Abram as well: “See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you” (**Gn 9,9**).

**Patristic commentaries:**

Augustine: heifer = people under the yoke of the law; goat = people who trespassed the law; ram = people who will have a king. These 3 animals stand for 3 periods in the history: Adam through Noah; Noah through Abraham; Abraham through David (who became king). Birds are a prophetic and allegorical symbol of spiritual people.

Cesareus from Arles: these animals stand for nations. They are 3 years old, because they will believe in the Trinity. First 3 animals are corporal people, who are in the Church; dove and pigeon are spiritual people.

**10. “He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up.”**

The fact of cutting the large animals and leaving the birds is reminiscent of the cultic prescription: “Then he shall skin the holocaust and cut it up into pieces” (**Lv 1,6**) and “Then, having split the bird down the middle without separating the halves...” (**Lv 1,17**). This particular way of sacrifice doesn't find any substance in the Israelite sacrificial system. It probably has to be seen on the background of an ancient ritual, where the destiny of these animals is called on the part that breaks covenant.

**11. “Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram stayed with them.”**

The attack of the birds has not a clear meaning here. Most commentators understand it as a bad sign. Much depends, however, on the meaning of the rite as a whole. The sacrificed animals could stand for Israel and the birds of prey (unclean animals!) for its enemies (Egypt): Abram defends Israel against foreign attacks.

**12. “As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him.”**

Remember that in v. 5 Abram was looking at the stars and thus it had to be night there. The reference to sun here would imply an origin of these two verses from different sources. Another explanation would be to postulate a certain time between these two moments (next day...).

“trance” is a deep sleep with the implication of supernatural stupor. A similar motive is found in the creation account: “So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh” (2,21); “So David took the spear and the water jug from their place at Saul's head, and they got away without anyone's seeing or knowing or awakening. All remained asleep, because the LORD had put them into a deep slumber” (1Sam 16,21). Deep sleep is a sign that something extraordinary is about to happen and God's revelation is close.

Terrifying darkness is a sign of God's presence (Israelites were afraid of thunder and clouds on Sinai as sign of God's presence): “the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that over the land of Egypt there may be such intense darkness that one can feel it” (Ex 10,21). Sleep, fear and darkness are closely related to the exodus story and conquest of the Land in the Biblical traditions. This motive will be introduced from the following verse on.

**13-16. “Then the LORD said to Abram: “Know for certain that your descendants shall be aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation they must serve, and in the end they will depart with great wealth. <sup>15</sup> You, however, shall join your forefathers in peace; you shall be buried at a contented old age. <sup>16</sup> In the fourth time-span the others shall come back here; the wickedness of the Amorites will not have reached its full measure until then.””**

These verses are a prophecy about the slavery in Egypt and departure after 400 years, which is put as equal to 4 generations (In the fourth time-span). Number 4 and its multiples (40, 400) are a symbolical way to cover the age of a person, or nation (Moses, Israel in the desert, Jesus).

There are several references to the text from Exodus: judgment on the nation they must serve: “For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every first-born of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt-- I, the LORD!” (Ex 12,12). Departure with great wealth is described as spoliation of Egypt: “The Israelites did as Moses had commanded: they asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. <sup>36</sup> The LORD indeed had made the Egyptians so well-disposed toward the people that they let them have whatever they asked for. Thus did they despoil the Egyptians” (Ex 12,35-36).

The promise of death in old age is effectively fulfilled: “then he (Abraham) breathed his last, dying at a ripe old age, grown old after a full life” (Gn 25,8). Reaching old age was a symbol of satiety and fullness of life: “Then Job died, old and full of years” (Job 42,17). “Joining forefathers” after death indicates the traditional burial in the family grave where the bones of the previous generations were collected and moved to a storage space under the burial benches.

**17. “When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking brazier and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces.”**

Evening was the usual time of God’s revelation and the time to bring sacrifice: “Noon passed and they remained in a prophetic state until the time for offering sacrifice” (1Ki 18,29).

“smoking brazier and a flaming torch” Smoke and fire are signs of God’s presence “The LORD preceded them, in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to show them the way, and at night by means of a column of fire to give them light” (Ex 13,21). It might be understood as God walking with his people as fulfillment of the covenant promise: “Ever present in your midst, I will be your God, and you will be my people” (Lv 26,12).

God, represented by the flame and fire, is passing between the animals’ halves as one of the partners of the covenant. This action is most commonly interpreted as an enacted course: “may it happen to me like to these animals, if I don’t keep the covenant”. Similar curse is attested in one of the eight-century treaties.

**18. “It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River (the Euphrates)”**

The covenant concluded with Abraham here is not identical with that on Mt. Sinai with the Israelites. That was an agreement imposing obligations on both God and Israel (like ancient treaties). With Abram, it is a promise of God confirmed by an oath while nothing is asked from Abram (like royal land grants).

The limits of the country are defined here as an important part of the promise. The river of Egypt is to be identified with Wadi el Arish in northeastern Sinai “turning from Azmon to the Wadi of Egypt, shall terminate at the Sea” (Nm 34,5). These limits of the country are only an approximation and a hyperbole. The closest to these ideal boundaries was the kingdom of Solomon: “Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, down to the border of Egypt” (1Ki 5,1). Still it remains questionable whether his kingdom effectively reached so far as pretended.

**19-21. “<sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites”**

There are several lists of the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan in the OT. These usually comprise 7 nations, while we have 10 here.

### **Meditatio**

**1.** The opening of this chapter is characterized by a notable contrast. On the one hand we have Abram like a great prophet who receives a word from God promising him protection and reward. The previous chapter (Gn 14) is echoed here with Abram as a successful warrior enjoying the spoils of battle. On the other hand, Abram’s condition is not positive at all! Despite all the repeated promises from God and the apparent success, he still has no child. In the eyes of his society this was considered the biggest tragedy: there was no one to carry on the family line and name; no one to preserve family inheritance; no one to care for that person in old age, carry out the funerary rites and take care of the family-tomb. This contrast is all the more apparent considering God’s promises of son and heir. Abram even wants to make Eliezer (one of his household) as his heir.

This contrast between promised and perceived life-satisfaction makes us reflect about the importance we attribute to property, possession, objects and people in our life. What is it that

really gives our lives the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment? Are there things we can't imagine our life without? Do I regard them as a result of God's blessing?

Abram can teach us one more lesson: people are more valuable than material possessions. Every person is a gift. While we can achieve a high degree of material prosperity through hard work and effort, people in our life should always be regarded as a gift we receive for shorter or longer time without merit on our part. Enjoy the presence of the people in your life, as long as they are there! "give me neither poverty nor riches; provide me only with the food I need" (**Pro 30,8**)

**2.** Living in an age where secular and religious areas are interwoven, many people question the existence of God or his involvement in the world. Abram "put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness". He believed in the Lord. This remark might sound surprising when related to the ancient world. In fact, the question about God's existence is a modern one and everybody was a believer in the ancient cultures. The Old Testament everywhere presupposes faith in God (exception: "Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God"" **Ps 14,1**), even though people might have lacked the sufficient degree of trust.

There is a reason for drawing attention to Abram's faith. It works like a paradigm and Abram is a model to imitate for all his descendants. In every situation they must have faith in God. Often, our faith is lived with many struggles and questions. Faith for us shouldn't be only a theoretical knowledge about God's existence, but rather the attitude of trust in him. It is a process and we have no guaranty about this attitude once and forever without any change and risk. That's why a permanent care for faith and growth in faith is a duty. A constant answer of faith is expected: in different situations replay anew. For us too, faith is a repeated and continuing action. "Those who have faith are children of Abraham" (**Gal 3,7**).

This faith was "credited to Abram as an act of righteousness". Several NT writers refer to this text about righteousness and apply it to the salvation provided by Christ: only thanks to the merits of Christ people are righteous. The concept of righteousness serves to express conformity to God's will: faith is the correct answer by which we respond to God's will. It involves both believing promises and obeying commands: belief and obedience, trust and works are complementary. Faith as an act of trust and confidence implies actions and good works. They only come in the second stage, but they are a natural implication of the first one: "By faith Abraham obeyed" (**Hebr 11,8**).

**3.** Besides all the promises, there is still space and also need for questions. "How am I to know?" is not a pure expression of doubt. Abram rather shows his faith asking for a sign to confirm the divine promise. This sign is given in the mysterious sacrifice (ritual) and accompanying message. Promissory oath about re-conquering the land after the liberation from slavery answers all the possible questions.

Asking questions is a sign of taking seriously God's message. It is a characteristic of profound and thoughtful people. We have Mary asking the angel: "Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"" (Lk 1,34). With our questions we don't intend to express doubts, but rather we try to understand the way God wants us to go, how he will be operating and pursuing his plans. Knowledge and understanding, at the same time, imply our involvement in carrying that plan out.

**4.** Multiple dimensions of Abram's life are hinted at in these scenes. He is depicted as a conquering king who has been granted victory over his enemies and promised a great territory. This will be eventually carried out in the Davidic dynasty (mainly David and Solomon - **2Sam 7**).

Besides that, Abram is viewed as a prophet too, enjoying a vision of God (v. 1) and being granted insight into the future (vv. 13-16). Finally, Abram is depicted as a priest in the sacrificial ritual of animals, birds, building altars, etc.

These three features reappear in the person of Moses and in Jesus in the New Testament. And the Second Vatican Council teaches that Christians, imitating Christ, should exercise the function of king, prophet and priest. King – having responsibility and governing; prophet – bringing God’s word to the world that needs it; and priest – sanctifying and offering the earthly reality to God. We are also reminded to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises” of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were “no people” but now you are God's people; you “had not received mercy” but now you have received mercy” (1Pt 2,9-10).

### **Conclusion**

Father, you formed man in your own likeness and set him over the whole world, to serve you, his creator, and to rule over all creatures. Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death, but helped all men to seek and find you. Again and again you offered a covenant to man, and through the prophets taught him to hope for salvation. This long process of learning and growth is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who has been sent in the fullness of times to be our Savior.

We ask you, Lord, to make us people attentive to your voice, ready to correct our old ways and able to answer with faith.