

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Abraham: father of the faith for Jews, Christians and Muslims

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Judaism, Christianity and Islam are referred to as the Abrahamic faiths. Each tradition sees Abraham as a pivotal figure in its history.

For Jews, Abraham is seen as the one from whom all Jews are descended. Abraham is the father of Isaac and grandfather of Jacob, who is renamed Israel and whose 12 sons represent the tribes of Israel. Abraham is called by God to go into a new land and in a covenant is declared to be the "father of multitudes." In Genesis, the first book of the Torah, God makes this promise: "I will make you

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a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 13:2)

For Christians,

Abraham is seen as the "father of the faith" and is honored for his obedience. The Apostle Paul expands the concept of being a descendent of Abraham when he writes in his letter to the Galatians:

So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

Scripture foresaw God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6-9, NIV)

In Islam, Abraham, called Ibrahim in the Quran, is honored for his obedience and submission to Allah and is considered one of the prophets. As one of the most frequently named people in the Quran, Abraham is called a friend of God and an example for all mankind.

If all three religions call Abraham the father of the faith, how is it that the three "children of Abraham" are so often in con-

flict? Is it just sibling rivalry or are the three in fundamental disagreement? But we also note that within each of the separate traditions there are divisions that can lead to violence. Whether it is Sunni vs. Shiite Muslims or Catholics vs. Protestants in Northern Ireland, tensions within can be as volatile as conflicts between religious communities.

While one can find differences between and within these three Abrahamic traditions, there is much in common, too. All three acknowledge God as the creator of the universe, believe that humans are created in the image of God, teach that we must be kind to the stranger and preach humility and the importance of

love and forgiveness. The differences are apparent and can be the focus of our attention. But we also can choose to find what we have in common and seek harmony, understanding and peace.

Here in West Michigan, we have an opportunity to seek that mutual understanding in an event sponsored by the Niagara Foundation. The Abrahamic Dinner will be held at Grand Rapids' Park Congregational Church tonight. Speakers representing the three Abrahamic faiths will be featured. More information and registration can be found at interfaithunderstanding.org or by calling 616-331-5702.

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