

Arts & Faith

Art and Commentary for Pentecost +6, Proper 11C by [Hovak Najarian](#)

Introduction

Greetings to everyone associated with St. Margaret's Sunday Morning Forum, [Genesis 18:1-10a](#) gives us an account of three men who arrived to visit Abraham as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. The Old Testament reading for Sunday, July 17, 2022 recounts how the three visitors were greeted and the surprise message they brought to Abraham.

The art is a mosaic titled, *The Hospitality of Abraham*. It offers a composite scene of the time the three men were with Abraham. ~Hovak Najarian

The Hospitality of Abraham, mosaic, c. 432-440, In the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, Italy, Artist unknown.

Commentary by Hovak Najarian



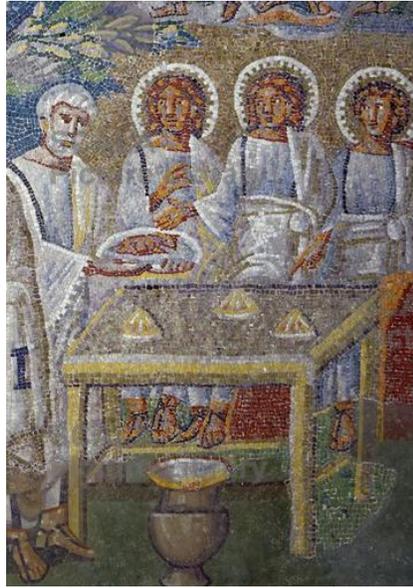
When Abraham saw three men coming to visit him, he bowed and said, “My Lord, if I find favor with you do not pass by your servant.” He asked that water be brought to wash their feet and invited them to rest beneath a tree.

In the mosaic, *The Hospitality of Abraham*, the artist presents a composite image of the activities described in the Book of Genesis. In the upper half, Abraham is bowing and greeting the men with a welcoming gesture. The mandorla that surrounds the central

figure suggests he is of higher standing. All three visitors are looking at Abraham but the one in the middle also is raising his hand and speaking. The visitors all have halos.

In the lower half of this mosaic we see Sarah, Abraham, and the three visitors (their feet have been washed and they are seated). All of the people look like fifth century Romans.

After greeting the visitors, Abraham rushed into the tent and said to Sarah, “Make



ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it and make cakes.” In this mosaic, Sarah is not shown to be in their tent as stated in the Genesis account; instead, she has been placed at the lower left in front of a church-like building. The curtained door behind her has a cross above it.

After his instructions to Sarah, Abraham followed by selecting a choice calf and having it prepared for the visitors’ meal. The figure of Abraham has been repeated as he turns his attention away from Sarah and is now serving a platter of meat to his guests. Three bread cakes already have been placed on a table where the visitors are seated. Beneath the table remains the basin of water in which their feet were washed. As a backdrop, Abraham, being of this earth, is standing in front of foliage, whereas the three haloed visitors are surrounded by gold to suggest they are from a heavenly realm.

Abraham stood nearby while the three visitors ate, and as they talked he was taken aback when told that Sarah would be having a child. Abraham and Sarah were both old and the thought of having a child at their age seemed preposterous (Sarah, listening from inside the tent, even laughed within at the prospect). Yet, just as the men said, a year later a son was born. He was given the name, Isaac.

There has been much speculation about the nature of the three men who visited Abraham. Was it God and two angels in the form of three men? Could this have been a manifestation of the Trinity?

Note: In Rome there are twenty-six churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The church in which the mosaic, *The Hospitality of Abraham*, is located is the largest of these and is known as *Santa Maria Maggiore* (Major).

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