



## 1

# God's Promise Comes True

## Scripture

[Genesis 15:1-6; 18:1-15; 21:1-7](#)

## Focus

God's promise to Abraham and Sarah came true when Isaac was born.

## Faith Nurture Goals

- Wonder how Abraham and Sarah felt when they waited for Isaac —and when he was born.
- Tell how God kept promises even when it seemed impossible.
- Thank God for keeping the promises made to us.



## Leader Reflection

### Preparing to Tell God's Story

The promise made to Abraham and Sarah in the last episode clearly includes the promise of a child, an heir. Yet here they are, childless. In Sarah's own words, "I am worn out and my lord is old." Over the years they've tried having a child via Hagar, the slave, and by designating the servant Eliezar as heir. But nothing works out, and God persists in his promise of a son.

One day three mysterious visitors show up at Abraham and Sarah's tent. Who are they? The text tells us that it is the LORD who has come for a visit. (Note that in the Old Testament, when "LORD" is in all caps, it refers to the holy covenant name of God, Yahweh.) It's all very mysterious, indeed, but the inspired writer will not or cannot tell us more.

Interestingly, this scene became a source for prayerful meditation in the Eastern Orthodox churches through its icons. More than mere pictures in the Orthodox tradition, icons are windows to look through in order to find spiritual truth. One famous and beautiful icon by Rublev called *\*The Holy Trinity\** pictures this very scene. Check it out on the web.

Abraham hurries out of his tent to serve the strange visitors, without ever asking who they are. While elaborate hospitality is common in that part of the world, there seems to be something more going on here, some kind of recognition that these visitors are very special.

After dinner is served, they get to the point. "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Nothing is said about Abraham's reaction, but our eyes immediately turn to Sarah lingering at the door of the tent. That's the focus of the visitors' attention as well, since they first ask about her whereabouts.

And what does Sarah do? She laughs to herself. "Yeah, sure, I haven't seen Abe in my bed for some time, and these people say there's to be a baby bouncing on my sagging knees?" Of course, she denies the derisive laughter, but the point is made: "Yes, you did laugh."

All of this fits a biblical pattern. Often in the Bible, when God is going to do something new, it begins in childlessness or barrenness, a symbol of human helplessness. Think of Rachel; of Sampson's parents, of Samuel's mother, Hannah; of John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth; and, of course, of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She's not barren but a virgin. After announcing her miraculous pregnancy, the visiting angel says to her, in words that closely echo what is said to Abraham and Sarah, "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

As we read so often in the Psalms, we find ourselves "waiting for the Lord." This story and so many others teach us that God will always fulfill promises, but not necessarily in the time frame we think reasonable. God is the God of the impossible possibilities. Isaac (which means laughter) is indeed born, and God has the last laugh.

## Steps

### Step 1 Breathe

*Use this time to focus your attention on God.*

**Do this with me: calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.** *(Demonstrate a few deep "in and out breaths" with eyes closed.)*

### Step 2 Tell and Wonder

**Materials:** Scarf or other large piece of fabric (such as a tablecloth) • brooch or necklace, optional

**Files:** [Story Symbols \(full unit\): Year 2 Unit 2](#)

**Let's enter God's story together. Here's the story symbol for the part of God's story that we'll be spending time in today. I wonder what clues it gives us about the story we're about to hear?** *(Show the story symbol. Accept any answers without giving away whether or not the kids have guessed correctly.)*

**Listen closely as we read the story together to see which story our symbol represents.**

*Read "God's Promise Comes True" aloud, pausing throughout to allow children to answer the wondering questions. NOTE: It's always a good idea to read through the story beforehand so you'll be able to tell it well.*

#### Re★formed

The Heidelberg Catechism asks how faith in God's providence helps us. "We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father" (Q&A 28).

You can also read the story from a children's Bible or a simplified translation of Scripture like the New International Reader's Version (NIRV). Remember to pause throughout to allow time to wonder.

## Story: God's Promise Comes True Genesis 15:1-6; 18:1-15; 21:1-7

Open the Bible to Genesis 18 and tell the kids that today's part of God's great story is found in Genesis 18. Point out the book name and the chapter number. Tell the group that you are going to read how the story begins, and that you want them to listen very carefully to find out who is about to pay a visit to Abraham. Read Genesis 18:1 aloud.

Drape the scarf or fabric over your head or shoulder. If you have a brooch or necklace, put it on too. As you do, tell the kids that today you will be Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Good morning! My name is Sarah. This week I will be telling you the story—and what an amazing story it is! But first, I have a question for you.

**Have you ever been promised something that you really, really wanted—like going to a special place with your family or getting to stay up late on a special night—and you just couldn't wait another day or another hour for that promise to come true? If you have, what was that special promise?** (Pause for responses.)

That is just how I felt when God promised that Abraham and I would have a baby. In fact, God had told Abraham that so many people would come from our children and grandchildren that no one would be able to count them—just like the stars in the night sky! I wanted that baby more than anything else, but twenty-five years had passed since God first promised us a child. That's a very, very long time to wait for a promise to come true.

I was ninety years old, much older than most of your grandmas, and still I had no baby. Each time I looked at the night stars I would think of God's promise to us and wonder if it would ever come true. Abraham and I would just shake our heads and laugh a little. We wondered if maybe God had forgotten the promise.

**Do you think God will keep this promise?** (Pause for response.) **Why do you think that?** (Pause for responses.)

One afternoon I was inside our tent, trying to stay cool during the hottest part of the afternoon, when I heard men's voices outside. Who could be passing by during the very hottest part of the day? I wondered. Slowly I got my aching old bones up. I peeked out of the tent flap, and there stood three strangers talking with Abraham.

*Who are they?* I wondered. *Where did they come from?* I listened carefully to see if I could hear what they were saying.

Then I heard my husband, Abraham, say, "Please stay. Let me get you something to eat. Rest right here before you travel any farther."

"Very well," said one of the strangers. "We'll be happy to stay and rest awhile."

Then Abraham hurried into the tent. "Quick, Sarah," he said, "we've got company! Get some flour and make some bread! I'll get the servants to help cook up some of our best meat!" You can be sure I didn't waste a

minute getting to work on that bread!

Soon the air was filled with the delicious smells of baking bread and roasting meat. Finally everything was ready; the strangers sat down to eat in the shade of the big tree just outside the tent. I peeked out and saw Abraham bringing them milk and cheese to go with their meal.

Then I heard one of the men ask, "Where's Sarah, your wife?"

Abraham pointed to our tent and said, "She's right over there in the tent."

I wondered how the stranger knew my name.

**You might already know who was visiting, but I didn't know. I was confused. If you were me, what would you have thought when you heard the stranger say your name?** *(Pause for responses.)*

Then I heard one of the strangers say, "In a year I will come back. By that time, Sarah, your wife, will have a son."

Wait a minute. Did I hear that right? How can that be? How could these strangers know about that promise God had given me and Abraham that we would have a baby and as many family members as there are stars in the sky? I couldn't help it—I laughed right out loud! That's because I was thinking how silly it was for an old lady like me to have a baby!

I heard someone say, "Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she wonder if she could really have a baby since she is old?"

Right then I understood that the person who had spoken was someone very special—someone who knew my name and even knew exactly what I was thinking! And who seemed to know about God's promise. But the stranger went right on talking, saying, "Is anything too hard for God? I will return to you at this time next year. And at that exact time, Sarah *will* have a son!"

Now I knew for sure—it was God! By this time I was afraid and shaking all over. So I quickly said, "I did not laugh!" But God said, "Yes, you *did* laugh." I was so embarrassed—of course God would know that I had lied! Then, just like that, the visitors left.

**How would you have felt after the visitors left?** *(Pause for responses.)*

Well, a whole year passed, and just as God had promised, I had a beautiful baby boy. Abraham named him *Isaac*. Abraham chose that name because it means *laughter*. Laughter is a good name for little Isaac because I—and Abraham too—had laughed at God's promise when we thought it was impossible.

Now Abraham and I laugh with joy at what God has done for us! Now we know that God's promises always come true! Always!

## Step **3** Pray

Close with prayer, asking the kids to repeat each sentence after you.

**Dear God, thank you for being a promise-keeping God.  
You kept your promise to Abraham and Sarah.  
You keep your promises to us.  
Help us always to remember that you keep your promises. Amen.**

See [5 Ways to Pray with Kids](#) for other ways to pray.

## Step **4** Respond

*Select and do one or more of the response activities from God's Big Story card #15 or check out [5 Ways to Retell a Bible Story with Kids](#) for some fun ways to retell this story. Include older kids in the retelling by having them read the story aloud while the younger children act it out.*

*\*God's Big Story cards can be ordered from [FaithAliveResources.org](http://FaithAliveResources.org).*

## Easy Extras

### 1. A Moment in Time

**Materials:** construction paper in light colors • scissors • markers • white paper • tape or glue

*Follow these steps in guiding the group:*

- *Give each person a piece of construction paper. Have them lay it in front of them horizontally.*
- *Cut a line halfway up the center of the paper and fold back the flaps.*
- *Draw the outside of a tent around the flaps.*
- *Draw Abraham and the three visitors on the outside of the tent.*
- *Tape or glue a piece of white paper to the backside of the construction paper, showing through the flap. Draw a picture of Sarah standing near the flap, laughing.*

*If you have older children in your group, encourage them to help the younger children if they have trouble cutting their tent or deciding what to draw.*

*As you work, use these wondering questions to retell and reflect on the story:*

- **When Sarah and Abraham talked about God's promise, how do you think they felt year after year when no baby came?**
- **Why do you think God dressed up as a stranger while visiting Abraham?**
- **How do you think God felt when Sarah laughed?**
- **How do you think Abraham and Sarah felt when Isaac was born?**
- **What does this story tell you about God?**

*If you're leading this session online, distribute materials to each family ahead of time, or let parents know what supplies they'll need to have available.*

## 2. Age-Specific Activities

Click below to access the full age-specific *Dwell* session for this story:

- Kindergarten-1st Grade: [The Birth of Isaac](#)
  - 2nd-3rd Grade: [God's Promise Comes True](#)
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