A Good Shepherd
Sacred Story

The Golden Calf

Adapted by:
Brenda J. Stobbe
Illustrations by:
Jennifer Schoeneberg

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THE GOLDEN CALF....MATERIALS

- medium wicker basket to hold:
  - wooden Moses figure
  - wooden Aaron figure
  - wooden calf
  - 2 wooden people of God figures
THE GOLDEN CALF....EXODUS 32

ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from it’s shelf. Return to the circle and sit down, placing the basket next to you.

In silence, gently stroke one or more of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Place Moses to the far left, away from you in the storytelling area.

Place Aaron in the center of the storytelling area.

Place the two people of God figures fairly close to Aaron on his right.

Shake your head sadly as you say "stopped believing".

Move the two people of God figures closer to Aaron as you speak.

Touch the Aaron figure as you speak.

Place the calf figure to the left of Aaron.

Touch the people of God figures as you speak.

Pile imaginary stones together.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

All the words to this story are inside of me. If you will make silence with me I will find all the words to this story of God’s people.

Moses had gone up to Mount Sinai to get the Ten Best Ways To Live from God.

While he was gone his brother, Aaron, was in charge.

Soon the people became upset that Moses stayed away so long.

They stopped believing that Yahweh was really a good and powerful God.

They told Aaron, "We want a god to lead us. Moses might never come back!"

Then Aaron told the people, "Bring me all the gold you have: rings, money, bracelets - everything."

When the people brought all the gold, Aaron made a statue of a calf.

Then the people believed that this calf was their god who had brought them out from the land of Egypt.

When Aaron saw the people with the calf, he built an altar in front of it.
Move the two people of God figures to the left of the calf. Then touch the calf as you speak of it.

Touch the Moses figure as you speak.

Touch each of the people of God figures.

Touch the Moses figure as you speak.

Move your arm from left to right to indicate the land that was promised.

Shake your head and touch at least one of the people of God figures.

Move the Moses figure toward the people of God, the calf and Aaron.

Touch the Moses figure and then the calf as you speak of it.

Throw down the imaginary tables, as though you are Moses.

Pick up the calf and cover it with one hand, moving your hand down to the base. Then place it in the basket.

Touch the Aaron figure.

The next day the people had a great celebration. They offered sacrifices to the calf and they played and ate and drank together.

On Mount Sinai, Yahweh said to Moses, "You must go back to the people now for they are no longer doing the things I told them to do. Instead they are worshipping a calf they've made."

Yahweh was very angry with the people of God and wanted to punish them.

But Moses told God to think about what the Egyptians would say if Yahweh took the people of God out of Egypt only to kill them in the wilderness.

Then Moses reminded God of the promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob to give their descendants a land.

So God decided not to kill the people of God.

God sent Moses back to the people with two tablets on which Yahweh had written the Ten Best Ways To Live.

When Moses got back to the people he saw them worshipping the golden calf.

Moses became very, very angry. He threw down the tablets with Yahweh’s words on them.

Then he melted the golden calf and made it into powder that he put in water and made the people of God drink.

When Moses asked Aaron why the people made the calf, Aaron told him a lie.
Open both hands, palms up, as you speak of "a calf".

Move the Moses figure back to the far left, away from you.

Touch each one of the people of God and Aaron.

He said the people had brought him gold and when he threw it into the fire a calf appeared.

The next day Moses talked again with Yahweh and asked Yahweh to forgive the sins of God’s people.

Yahweh said their sins would be forgiven, but someday things might still happen to them because of what they had done in making the calf.

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WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder why the people thought a calf could be a god?

I wonder why Aaron listened to the people?

I wonder why Moses broke the tablets?

I wonder why Aaron lied to Moses?

I wonder why God forgave the people?

I wonder if I ever do anything that needs God’s forgiveness?

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Carefully place all the figures back in the basket, one at a time.

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to it’s shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Be certain each of the children have had a chance to choose their work before dismissing all the children at the same time.

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

I wonder what you will make your work today? Let’s go around the circle and everyone can choose what they want to do.
THE GOLDEN CALF....TEACHER HELPS

This story is very complex and can be difficult for adults to understand even as they tell it in simple language to children. The Canaanite culture had a god shaped like a calf or cow. The god was called Baal. No doubt the people of God (Israelites) would have seen and/or heard of this god once they became part of the land of Canaan. This accounts for the shape the idol took.

The passage is very confusing in the use of references to persons and god. At first Moses is given the power and authority to have delivered the people of God from Egypt (see Exodus 32:1). Then after Aaron has made the calf he refers to the calf in plural when he says, "These are your gods" (see Exodus 32:4). Next Aaron proposes a feast to the Lord and yet the people are accused of worshiping the calf. It is possible that the calf, like the seraphim on the ark of the covenant was a seat for Yahweh. (The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible, edited by Charles Laymon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, p.31)

Neither are we used to a God who can be talked out of a decision. And yet Moses is able to remind God that the Egyptians will think Yahweh weak if the people die after their amazing delivery. Moses also reminds Yahweh of the promise made to the forefathers. It is as though Moses is saying, "You are not a God who goes back on promises, are you?"

Please note that I have intentionally left out Exodus 32:25-29. I do not feel children of young ages will gain anything from hearing this story. Neither am I convinced it was part of the original story. To me it sounds much more likely that it was added later to give validity to the Aaronic (Levitical) priesthood. (The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible, edited by Charles Laymon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, p.64) I am also unwilling to make the murder of a brother, or neighbor a reason for ordination as Exodus 32:29 states. This makes an interesting discussion for adults, but I do not believe the child’s classroom is the place for this part of the story.

The wondering questions start with a wonderment about why a calf could be thought of as a god. The information given in paragraph three of the teacher helps may be useful to you here, but there is no right answer. Allow the children to wonder. Some of the older ones may have heard stories about Baal and will respond in kind.

The second question deals with Aaron being so willing to listen to the people. The children may respond that he was afraid of the people, or that he, too, feared Moses wouldn’t return and sought leadership elsewhere. As we wonder why Moses broke the tablets the children will probably respond because he was so angry with the people. This is according to our story. Also in Moses’ day when a covenant was made between two parties each party agreed to what they would do. If one party broke their piece of the agreement, the covenant could be negated by breaking the tablets on which it was written. (The Bible Almanac, J.I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, William White, Jr.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1980, p.31)
Our last three questions move toward the personal. We wonder why Aaron lied. Was he afraid of Moses, or of God? Did he believe if he lied to Moses and Moses believed him that God would also believe his story? See what the children say. Next, we think about why God forgave the people. The children who listened closely may remember what you said about the Egyptians and the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Others may respond that it was because God loved the people. The final question moves to our forgiveness -- not our sin. This is not to say that sin is not part of the life of a child. I believe young children recognize their sin and, if anything, are unwilling to forgive themselves. So in this question we give them a way to move toward forgiveness, not a way to hang on to sin. If God could forgive a whole people, then they may believe that God will forgive them their sins.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Discuss why the people would have preferred to worship a calf instead of the invisible God of the people of God.

When Moses came down from the mountain and saw the people worshipping the calf, he threw down the tablets and broke them. When he did that he broke God’s part of the promise. Later God gave that promise back to the people. Think of a time when you broke a promise to someone. How did you feel? Did you ever try to keep that promise later? How have you felt when someone broke a promise they made to you? Were you willing to let them keep their promise later or were you too angry to forgive them?

What are some "golden calves" we might think more of today than we think of God? Video games, clothes, what our friends think or how much money we have are all possibilities. Can you think of any other things that are so important to you that you give them a higher place than God?