

A Good Shepherd
Sacred Story

The Baby Named Laughter

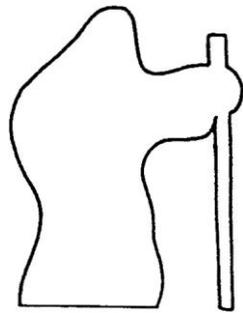
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2nd Edition
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THE BABY NAMED LAUGHTER MATERIALS

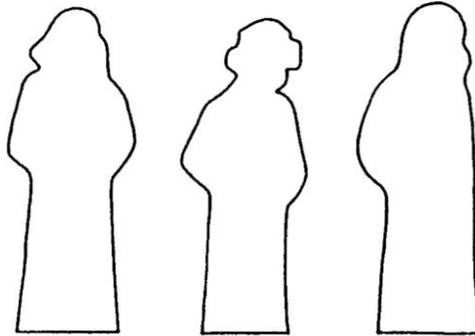
- medium wicker basket to hold:
 - wooden figure of Abraham
 - wooden figure of Sarah
 - 3 wooden figures of strangers



Abraham



Sarah



Strangers

THE BABY NAMED LAUGHTER GENESIS 18:1-15, 21:1-7

ACTIONS

After speaking, go to the shelf and remove the story basket. Return to your place in the circle and set the basket in front of you.

After speaking, reverently touch one or more of the wooden figures during the 15-20 seconds of silence.

Remove the Abraham and Sarah figures from the basket and place them to left center. As you say "all of the desert", gesture broadly with your arm to include a large space.

Move Abraham to right center.

As you speak of the stars, make an arc towards the sky by moving your hand from left to right. Run your hand smoothly over the floor as you speak of the sands.

Look concerned. Shake your head slowly as you say "and still".

Place the three strangers at top center. Start to move the three strangers toward Abraham.

Move Abraham to the strangers.

WORDS

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

All of the words for this story are inside of me. Will you make silence with me, please, while I find all of those words?

After the man named Abraham and the woman named Sarah had found the Lord in all of the desert, they lived happily in the land the Lord had given them. It was called Canaan. They had many cattle and sheep. Abraham was thought to be very wealthy by his neighbors.

Many times Abraham remembered the covenant, the promise, the Lord had given him. The Lord had promised that Abraham would have as many children, grandchildren, great-grand-children and so on as there were stars in the sky or sand on the shore.

But Abraham was worried. He was getting to be an old man. And Sarah was becoming an old woman, and still they had no child.

Then one day, Abraham looked out of his tent and saw three strangers approaching.

It was a very hot day and Abraham went to offer the strangers cool water to drink and food to eat.

Nod your head and smile. Move Abraham to far right and Sarah to far left. Then move Abraham back to the men and Sarah to left center.

Gently touch Sarah at left center.

Turn Abraham to face Sarah.

Open your eyes very wide and lean forward slightly.

As you speak, begin to laugh.

Make your words sound incredulous and shake your head.

PAUSE

Speak softly but confidently.

Nod your head slowly.

Cradle your right arm in your left as you speak of the baby.

Smile and raise your palms to eye level.

The three strangers accepted and Abraham and Sarah hurried to fix food for them. Abraham brought it to the men to eat.

The men asked, "Where is your wife?" Abraham said, "She's in the tent."

Then the voice of the Lord spoke. "Next spring at this time," said the Lord, "your wife, Sarah, will have a son."

Sarah was listening at the door to her tent. When she heard the words about the baby, she laughed.

She was ninety years old and Abraham was one hundred. She thought she was too old to have a child.

Then the voice of the Lord spoke to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord to do?"

The Lord remembered the promise made to Sarah and Abraham. The next spring a precious baby boy was born to Abraham and Sarah.

They named him Isaac, which means "laughter". And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me."

And Abraham, Sarah, and the baby named laughter lived long in the land the Lord had given them.

WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder what the Lord's voice sounded like?

I wonder what Sarah's laughter sounded like?

I wonder if Sarah laughed after her baby was born?

Put the pieces back in the basket one at a time.

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

After speaking, stand and, carrying with two hands, return the basket to the proper shelf. Then return to the circle.

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.

Dismiss the children to their work after everyone has had a chance to choose what they will do.

What will you make your work today? You may have special feelings about this story that you would like to paint or draw. Let's begin.

THE BABY NAMED LAUGHTER TEACHER HELPS

The thrust of this story is that we worship a God who keeps God's promises. Abram left his homeland to go where God told him. The promises God made to Abram were many. They included land, wealth and heirs. But in this story we share the sadness, disillusionment and lack of hope that Abram experienced, even after his name was changed to Abraham when the covenant and promise of an heir had been restated in Genesis 15 :4-6. Then, comes the rather confusing visit of the three strangers. We are not told that any of these three are God, but about halfway through their presentation we are suddenly hearing the voice of the Lord. I have tried to tell this story as faithfully as possible, simply naming the voice of the Lord, without explaining the conflict.

The lesson taught to Abraham, Sarah and all of the people of God is that nothing is impossible when God is in the picture. The extreme ages of Abraham and Sarah in this story make the barrenness of Sarah a certainty that cannot be changed. But in the womb of a 90 year

old barren woman God placed the promise of a nation. Notice that it is not Abraham's son by Hagar who is allowed to be the heir. It must be Sarah's son. Abraham is not the only one of God's people to be a factor in the promise. Sarah is to be the mother of the promised heir, as God said. And Abraham can try all he wants to work his own destiny. Here it is Yahweh who will decide which child will carry the promise of a great nation with him. And the child will be the son of Sarah.

The laughter of Abraham and Sarah when the birth of the child is promised in this story is not joyful laughter, but rather skeptical and derisive laughter. This laughter is the laughter of the ridiculous and probably produces tears of pain and frustration rather than joy. But the laughter of Sarah after the birth of the child, when the heir is named Isaac, or laughter, is what we call the Easter laugh. It is the laughter that finally accepts the impossible as reality and opens new possibilities for life. It is pure joy and tends to cause those around to smile, even if they don't know what caused the laughter.

Note that we do not have a story in the Good Shepherd room regarding God asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. That story is not appropriate for the broadly graded classroom we call for in this program. If there are children in the room that ask about the story, tell them that you will talk with them about that after the story presentation is finished and you are free to be with them one on one. Be sure to emphasize as you read the story together that God provided a way for Isaac to be spared. We don't know why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, we just know God arranged for Isaac to be spared.

The wondering questions begin with a wonderment about how God's voice sounded. This is a verbalization of a very common wonderment of children. They wonder what God looks like, how God sounds and all the other concrete characteristics they know about other people. The most difficult thing to teach young children is the concept of God as a spirit. Spirit is a conceptual word and children do not think conceptually until they are about 12 years old. So we allow them to wonder how God's voice sounds. All answers are as valid as the others since none of us really knows the answer.

After wondering about God's voice, we wonder about Sarah's laughter. It will be interesting to see if any of the children, now or later, pick up on the kind of laughter Sarah hid behind the tent flap.

The final wondering question allows for the difference in laughter that Sarah may have experienced as she proclaims, "God has made laughter for me." Children may be able to share their laughter and joy at the birth of a sibling or close friend's child.

The covenant made with Abraham is the earliest covenant in the Bible. This is really the beginning of the history of the people of God. The promise to Abraham included land, wealth and an heir. By the end of this story Abraham has all three. Newness and hope has come from barrenness. And with God nothing is impossible.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

How do you think Sarah and Abraham felt about God's promise when they got to be really old and still didn't have a baby?

There are many kinds of laughter. In your experience you have heard laughter that makes you hurt, the kind that makes fun of someone. You have also heard laughter that makes you want to join in with the ones laughing. When Sarah heard the words about the baby, she laughed. Which kind of laughter was this?

Sarah and Abraham were so old it HAD to be God who had created the baby. Have you ever felt like there were times when you did something and you don't know how you did it? Have you considered that maybe God had a hand in it?