

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

NOTE: As the divine names for God used by the author show, this story in the life of Abraham and Sarah was written according to the Elohist (God) tradition compared to the Yahwistic (LORD) version of chapter 16, which told of a previous flight into the desert by Hagar after a dispute with Sarah. Each story attempted to explain the origins of the ongoing, tumultuous relationship that existed between the two related peoples who descended from Isaac and Ishmael living in the southern desert of Judah.

DAY ONE

Read Genesis 21:1-4

1. In last week's lesson, the promise that Sarah would have a son, first made to Abraham and Sarah 25 years earlier, was renewed by three heavenly visitors. Complete verses 1-2 below which show how the LORD finally brought about this miraculous event.

The Lord dealt with Sarah

and the Lord did for Sarah

Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age

2. Though the fulfillment of this promise took decades of waiting, how is this a good story to use when encouraging someone to trust in God?

3. Abraham once again demonstrated his obedience to the LORD and gave the name Isaac to his son born to Sarah (verse 3). God chose the child's name which means, *he laughs* (see Genesis 17:19). What does that tell you about God?

4. Just as God kept his promise, Abraham performed his part of the covenant responsibilities (see Genesis 17:10-12). Record his actions according to verse 4.

5. Look up Luke 1:26-33 and compare the conception and birth of Christ with that of Isaac, his ancestor.

6. CONNECTION: Today we learn that the long-awaited birth of a son to Abraham and Sarah has occurred. The promise God made so long ago has been fulfilled. Having our prayers answered is a wonderful blessing and joy. Ours is a God of miracles who delights in answering our prayers. Have you been blessed with answered prayers in your life? How do answered prayers help us grow in faith?

Read and record Psalm 13:6. Begin your prayer today confident that God hears and answers your prayers.

DAY TWO

Read Genesis 21:5-7

7a. In verse 5 we learn that Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born. Something seemingly impossible was made possible. Sarah expressed her delight in being a mother so late in life. Record her words of joy in verse 6.

b. Recall that Sarah laughed when she heard that she was to have a son in her old age (Genesis 18:12). Comment on whether you think her laughter was different in verse 6.

NOTE: Abraham was blessed to live a long life as a father to the age of 175 years old (Genesis 25:7). Sarah lived to be one hundred twenty-seven years old (Genesis 23:1).

8. This is the third time that laughter was mentioned with reference to the promise or birth of Isaac (Genesis 17:17; 18:12). Why do you think that is?

9. Our laughter and joy are gifts from God. Record a phrase from one of the following verses that demonstrates God's invitation through emotion to trust in him.

Psalm 126:2-3

Proverbs 31:25-26

Romans 15:13

10. Sarah continued to express her joy and amazement with bearing a son for Abraham. Record her words of wonder in verse 7.

11. Read Hebrews 11:11 or Romans 4:19-20 and note how St. Paul describes the role that faith played in bringing about the miracle of Isaac's birth.

12. CONNECTION: Today we read how Sarah rejoiced with laughter at the happiness God brought into her life by this astonishing birth. She wanted everyone to hear of her triumph in her old age and laugh with her. Often God's miracles can make us laugh and shout for joy! God in his wisdom has given us the gift of emotions and he wants us to express them fully. How do your emotions help you to express your faith? Can you think of an example of how emotions, even unpleasant ones, can lead you to deeper knowledge of Christ?

Ecclesiastes 3:4 reminds us that there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Let this thought lead you into prayer.

DAY THREE

Read Genesis 21:8-10

13. Abraham was delighted to finally have a son by Sarah and held a great feast when Isaac was weaned (verse 8). Read 2 Maccabees 7:27 about Hebrew customs of weaning infants. From this passage, how old you think Isaac was at this time?

NOTE: Recall that Ishmael was born before Isaac. He was approximately fourteen years older than Isaac and sixteen or seventeen years old at the time of this story (Genesis 17:25). Although born of a concubine, Ishmael was in fact, Abraham's firstborn in a society in which the firstborn son is the principle heir.

14. In verse 9 Sarah saw Hagar's son, also born to Abraham, playing with her son, Isaac. List some of the things that might have occurred between the boys.

NOTE: The Hebrew for "playing" is "laughing", here in the negative sense of "laughing at". To the distress of Sarah, the teenager Ishmael is taunting or mocking the toddler Isaac. Paul will later interpret this as an act of persecution (Gal 4:29). *Ignatius Study Bible*

15. Sarah reacted negatively to Ishmael's behavior with her son. What did she demand of Abraham in verse 10?

16. What does this tell you about Sarah and Hagar's relationship after Hagar returned from her first journey into the wilderness?

17. Comment on how Sarah's action to encourage Abraham to cast Ishmael out may have been useful for God's purposes.

18. CONNECTION: Today we read how the actions of Hagar's son at the celebration for Isaac robbed Sarah of all her joy. She demanded that Abraham cast out Hagar and her son. The faults of our ancestors are recorded in Scripture to remind us that the men and women of old were no different than we are and to help us learn from their mistakes. Like Sarah, we don't always react to particular situations in our lives in the best possible manner, but families are important to God. What are some ways to resolve family conflicts? Have you found successful techniques to mend a broken relationship?

We read in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "These things happened to them to serve as an example and to instruct us." Let that thought lead you into prayer today.

DAY FOUR

Read Genesis 21:11-13

19. As today's lesson begins, Abraham was very distressed after hearing Sarah's demand to cast out the slave woman with her son according to verse 11 (recall Genesis 17:18). What might have been some other choices for Abraham to resolve this family conflict?

20. Consider the tumultuous history between Abraham and Sarah and describe an incident from their past that illustrates why she might have felt justified in making this harsh demand of him.

21a. As he considered Sarah's demands, Abraham received guidance from God. Complete below what he was told in verse 12.

Do not be distressed

whatever Sarah says to you

for it is through Isaac

b. Why do you think Abraham was told by God to go along with Sarah's unfair demands?

22. In your own words, what promise did God make to Abraham concerning the son of the slave woman in verse 13?

23. Read Romans 9:6-9 and paraphrase Paul's explanation of the relationship between Abraham's children.

24. CONNECTION: Today Abraham anguished over the command given him by the LORD to follow Sarah's demand to cast out Hagar and his son. Though this was a painful experience in Abraham's life, God was working to accomplish his plan. If we believe in a God who is all-knowing and ultimately in control of all things, then we must trust that he brings us to the right place for reasons we may never understand. Can you think of an example from your life of an unexpected grace resulting from a bad experience?

Read and record Romans 8:28. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the times that God was with you in times of distress.

DAY FIVE

Read Genesis 21:14-18

NOTE: In the traditional Hebrew text, the data of the Priestly source represents Ishmael as at least fourteen years old when Isaac was born. In the present Elohist story, Ishmael is obviously a little boy, not much older than Isaac. *NABRE*

25. Early the next morning, Abraham followed God's instructions and Hagar departed. Describe the actions of each of them below according to verse 14.

Abraham

Hagar

26. When Hagar ran out of water, she left her child under one of the bushes for protection from the sun. Then she went a good way off and sat opposite him. She lifted up her voice weeping and spoke (verses 15-16). Who do you think Hagar was talking to and what might have been some of her thoughts at this moment?

27. In verse 17, the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven telling her, "Do not be afraid." It was not Hagar's cries that captured the LORD's attention. God heard the voice of the boy. Why do you think that was?

NOTE: Ishmael's name means "God hears."

28. What direction and hope was given to Hagar by the angel of God (verse 18)?

NOTE: The Angel of God (verse 17) is likely the same heavenly messenger who spoke to Hagar the first time she left. *Ignatius Study Bible*

29. In referring to the angel of God from our passage today, our Commentary (page 47) comments on the presence of guardian angels in our lives. "From its beginning until death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession." (CCC 336) What does it mean to you that your life is guarded by angels?

30. **CONNECTION:** Today we read that when God heard the voice of the boy crying, the angel of God reassured her, "Do not be afraid." She was told to return to her son and "hold him fast with your hand." God was providing the guidance and encouragement she needed to return and care for him. God places many in our care and sometimes the only thing we can do is to hold tightly to their hands. How has this simple gesture been an act of grace, faith, love or support in your life? Share some thoughts with your group.

Read Psalm 139:7-10 and record verse 10. As you begin your prayer today, be aware of your hand in God's as he leads you throughout your day.

DAY SIX

Read Genesis 21:19-21

31. As today's lesson begins, God was with Hagar in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. According to verse 19, what did he do and how did she respond?

32. We learned in this lesson that although Ishmael was cast out of Abraham's house and abandoned by his earthly father, God was with him as he grew. He lived in the wilderness and was an expert huntsman and married an Egyptian woman (verses 20-21). What does this tell you about God?

33. According to verse 21, they lived in Paran and Hagar got an Egyptian wife for Ishmael. What do you find interesting about Hagar arranging a marriage for her son?

34. Ishmael became the ruler of a large tribe or nation. The Ishmaelites were nomads living in the wilderness of Sinai and Paran, south of Israel. Look up one of the following verses and summarize what you learn about him

Genesis 25:9

Genesis 25:12-17

Genesis 28:8-9

35. Refer to the Commentary, page 47, and comment on the importance of the story of Hagar and Ishmael.

36. CONNECTION: Today we read that, when faced with a desperate need in the desert, Hagar's eyes were opened by God to see a well of water. Sometimes when we are in deepest despair, we are unable to see the answers that are right in front of us until God opens our eyes to the solution. This might come from reading words of Scripture, a friend's advice, a good book or an inspiring homily. Describe a time recently when your eyes were suddenly opened with God's grace, and you gained a spiritual or personal insight that helped you. Share some thoughts with your group.

Read and record Ephesians 1:18. Let thoughts of being open to the word of God begin your prayer today.

Read pages 46-47 in *The Book of Genesis* by Lawrence DiPaolo, Jr., Ph.D. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.