

## LESSON 2

*ISAAC IS BORN, AND GOD TESTS ABRAHAM*

Finally, a son is born to Abraham and Sarah as God had promised, and he is named Isaac. Abraham is 100 years old.

When Isaac is a child, God calls to Abraham, telling him to take Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice to God. Abraham then takes Isaac to the mountain as he is told and prepares to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering. But the angel of the Lord stops him and provides a ram to sacrifice instead.

Because of the faith and obedience that Abraham has shown in this trial, God once again promises descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

### **KEY CONCEPTS**

* Trust in God
* Oneness with God
* Grace of God

**WHERE YOU’LL FIND TODAY’S STORY** **In the Bible:**

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible.

**Genesis 21:1-7** (birth of Isaac)

**Genesis 22:1-19** (God tests Abraham)

###  **WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY**

Abraham and Sarah had to cut themselves off from their entire past when they left their homeland, and now Abraham is summoned to give up their entire future. The testing of Abraham goes to the heart of Abraham’s life, his hope for meaning and his trust in God. He is about to give up his only child, on whose life the fulfillment of God’s promise depends. God is shown to us as the Lord whose demands are absolute, whose will is inscrutable, whose final word is…*grace.*

Abraham, silently trusting and obedient, shows the moral grandeur required of the founder of Israel. He entrusts his entire life and future to God. He is willing to lift up human love and consecrate it to the love of God. We know—but he does not—that God is testing him. At the end, Abraham has learned to give up control over his own life so that he might receive it back as grace.

The nature of God is revealed in the moment that God stops Abraham’s hand from harming Isaac and prevents the sacrifice. Abraham is not blessed for correctness in discerning God’s will; he is blessed because he thought he knew God’s will and was willing to obey. The truth is that the dedication that God desires is not to death but to life.

At the end, God does not require Isaac’s sacrifice, the sacrifice of Abraham’s only son. But God does, many years later, sacrifice God’s only Son, Jesus.

At the time of Abraham and Sarah, sacrifice of children was not uncommon in other nearby lands. Our God, however, says something different. People in the lands around Abraham and Sarah offered up their children to show their faith and obedience to false gods. Should Abraham do as much? *God does not ask him to*. The love is probed, but the demand not made.

What *is* asked by God is something different: oneness between the heart of God and the heart of the person. As part of *the family of God*, we also strive toward that oneness. Hopefully, we may not have to face the same decision that Abraham faced, but we do face decisions in our everyday lives about how much we want to control our own lives and how much we are willing to let God lead us.

The whole point is for us, members of *the family of God*, to learn to receive God’s life and love and protection over us as God’s gift to us, and to be able to accept it in trust and faith. For we *are* God’s people.

### **A black and white drawing of a shield  AI-generated content may be incorrect.THE EPISCOPAL THREAD**

The story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, is so important to Judaism that they have a special name for it: the *Akedah,* or “the Binding of Isaac.”

This story is important in Christianity also. It is one of the nine readings of “the record of God’s saving deeds in history” in the Great Vigil of Easter. The prayer that follows the reading relates this event and the promise to Abraham to the Paschal sacrament, asking God to “multiply...the number of your children that your Church may rejoice to see fulfilled your promise to our father Abraham” (*BCP*, p. 289).

The story is read during Lent, bringing to mind a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of God’s Son, Jesus, and reminding us how, even when we are walking a difficult and painful journey, God still loves and stays with us.

We are also reminded that God is a God of life. The Episcopal Church’s opposition to the death penalty is based partly on the belief that God’s desire for us is not death but life.

In Eucharistic Prayer C, our connection to Isaac is reaffirmed as we pray to “Lord God of our Fathers; God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...” even though we will hear very little more of Isaac in the Bible. Isaac is an important link in the making of God’s people, and so he is recognized by the Church*.*

### **A black and white logo  AI-generated content may be incorrect.WEAVING GOD’S BELOVED COMMUNITY**

Abraham and Sarah love their son Isaac and nearly lose him—or so they think. Some scholars doubt that God would test Abraham is such a way, but this story raises the question of what it means to sacrifice something you value.

Generally, “sacrifice” is the giving up of something good in order to receive something better. In this story, Abraham has put devotion to God as the highest priority above all else.

The natural environment is limited; what would we sacrifice in order to have a viable water supply in our community? What would we be willing to sacrifice in order for the poor or homeless to have sustainable lives? People in God’s Beloved Community build that community upon the foundation of equitable sharing of resources and common respect for the needs of others.

When was a time you had to give something up for something else? Maybe you had conflicting activities at school or you had homework that needed to be done? How did it feel to give up one thing in order to have another? Can you imagine having to make that decision about things you need in your life (like shelter, food, water, clean clothes, etc.)? What might it look like to share what you have extra of with those who don’t have enough?



 Genesis 21:1-7; 22:1-19

**It’s a Boy!**

Abraham and Sarah have been patient. Very patient. God promised them that they will have a son and they have been waiting.

Abraham turns 100 years old. Then Sarah turns 90. And then, Sarah has a baby. “It’s a boy!” She laughs, just like she laughed when then angels first told Abraham, years and years ago, that she would bear a son.

She calls the baby *Isaac*, which means “laughter.” She remembers the exact day when those three angels came to their tent and told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child. She remembers how she laughed to herself, and when the angels heard her, she flushed with embarrassment and pretended she was coughing. “No, you did laugh,” said one, and she felt like she had been scolded.

But here is her laughter, lying in her arms. And now she laughs again— this time, a joyful, thankful laugh. “God has made me laugh,” she says, “and everybody will laugh with me. Because what God promised to us has happened! Who would have thought I would be a mother at 90 and Abraham a father at 100!”

**God Tests Abraham’s Faithfulness to God**

Isaac grows up. He is now a teenager, and the family is happy. God has promised that their family will keep on having children and grandchildren, as many as the stars.

But one day, God decides to find out how much Abraham will do what God asks. So God calls to Abraham: “Abraham!” God shouts in his ear.

Abraham says, “Here I am!” even though God knows perfectly well where Abraham is.

God says, “Take Isaac to Moriah, where there is a little mountain. There, I want you to kill Isaac for me, the way you kill a little lamb for me. He will be your offering to me.”

The Bible does not tell us what Abraham is thinking. Is he surprised?

Sad? Angry at God? Afraid? He probably has some of all these feelings, but he doesn’t show them when he has dinner with Isaac and Sarah. He keeps quiet about what God has said.

Abraham doesn’t sleep that night. When it is morning, but before the sun comes up, Abraham gets up. He puts a saddle on his donkey. Then he wakes up two young men who are part of his family’s helpers. Then he cuts some wood that he will use for the offering, which is to be burned—what they call a “burnt offering.”

When everything is ready, he wakes up Isaac and tells him they need to go on a journey. Isaac may be confused, but he goes with his father Abraham. They set off. It takes three days to get to Moriah, where the mountain sits waiting for them.

Abraham sees the mountain far away. He says to the two men, “Stay here with the donkey. Isaac and I will go over to that mountain to worship God. Then we will come back and find you.” So the two men set up camp and wait for Abraham and Isaac to come back and take them home again.

Then Abraham picks up the wood he had chopped and puts it on Isaac’s back. Isaac is a strong boy. He can carry the wood up the mountain. Abraham carries the knife and the fire in a little firepot. Abraham and Isaac walk along together for a while.

Then Isaac starts wondering. “Father,” he says. “I have a question.” “What do you want to know?” says Abraham.

“We have the fire, and we have the wood, and we have the knife for the offering. But where is the lamb? Don’t we need a lamb or an animal to burn?”

Abraham is quiet. He doesn’t know how to tell Isaac that *Isaac* will be the animal to burn because that’s what God told Abraham. Then he says, “My dear son, God himself will give us the lamb.” He knows that this is not true, but he does not want to tell Isaac that he needs to kill Isaac for God.

Finally, Abraham and Isaac come to an open area. God tells Abraham to stop. This is the place.

Abraham builds an altar. He takes some stones and piles them high. Then he puts the wood on top. He calls Isaac to him. Trembling, Isaac goes to his father. Isaac has figured out what Abraham is going to do. *So I will be the lamb for the burnt offering!*

Abraham ties up Isaac and picks him up. Isaac is heavy, but Abraham is strong. He lays Isaac on top of the wood. Then he takes his knife out of his pocket and lifts it high into the air. He starts to lower the knife toward Isaac as Isaac closes his eyes in fear.

Suddenly an angel calls out with God’s voice, “Abraham! *Abraham*!

ABRAHAM!”

Abraham stops, his hand still in the air holding the knife. He is shaking now. “Here I am!” he says.

God says, “Do not touch your son. Do not do anything to hurt him. Now I know that you will do whatever I ask of you. You were even willing to give up your son for me. Now let him go. He will not be the offering you give to me.”

Abraham lowers his hand, throws down his knife, and unties Isaac. He is tired, but very happy. He has tears in his eyes. Isaac gets up off the wood and waits to see what his father will do now. Abraham looks up from Isaac, and there, in the woods, he sees a ram. The ram’s horns are caught in the thick bushes and the ram cannot run away. Abraham says to Isaac, “*There* is the offering we will give to God!”

So the two of them catch the ram and put it on the wood, offering the animal to God. And they get on their knees and worship God. When they are finished, they go back down the mountain and find the two men who are waiting for them.

The two men see Abraham and Isaac come back down the mountain. The sacrifice is done, they think, and all is well. Now it’s time to go home.