Listening to God’s Voice

We find true and abiding life in Jesus.
- In today’s gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that he will endure hard times—even death upon the cross.
- We tell today’s gospel to the children, but focus on the Old Testament figures of Abraham and Sarah, who, like Jesus, listened to God’s voice—and obeyed.
- In today’s session we also continue to explore the season of Lent.

Question of the Week
What times of transformation have I experienced? How have I changed?

Core Session
- Getting Started
- Old Testament Story: God’s Promise Brings New Life
- Story-Review Game: Child of Abraham
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Welcome the Good News
- Singing Together
- Gospel Story: The Mysterious Evening
- Art: Story-Review Pictures
- Literature: Porter’s “Another Sarah”
- Info: Children and the Lectionary
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
- More about Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- Liturgy Link: Postures of Prayer
- The World of the Bible: Son of Man

Scriptures
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Mark 8:31-38
**Getting Started** (10-15 minutes)

Children play a guessing game based on sounds. Invite children to handle the noisemakers before play.

*Directions for play:*
- A volunteer chooses a noisemaker.
- The other children turn their backs or hide their eyes while the volunteer sounds the noisemaker.
- The children guess what is making the sound.

After 5-10 minutes’ play discuss:
- Which sounds were the hardest to guess? Why?
- When is listening easy? hard?

Explain:
- In today’s story, someone does the hardest listening job of all—listening to God.

**Old Testament Story** (5-10 minutes)

**God’s Promise Brings New Life**

Long ago there lived an old, old man and an old, old woman. They had shared a good long life together, but they had also shared one great sadness. They had never had a baby.

One day when the old man, Abram, was quiet—listening for God—God spoke to him and said, “Go! Leave your hometown. Take your wife, Sarai, and pack up everything you need. I promise to lead you somewhere new.”

Abram and Sarai set off, wondering where they were headed. After many days of traveling they arrived in Canaan, where God spoke again. “This is the land I plan to give to you and to all your children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren and...”

Abram and Sarai looked at each other. What a strange promise. How could they have great-grandchildren when they didn’t have even one baby? But Sarai listened and she heard: “You will have a child.” She laughed out loud at what she heard, but she listened. And God loved her.

Before long, Sarai was pregnant. No one could believe it! Nine months later she had a baby boy. Just as God had promised—in that new land, in their old age—Sarai and Abram became a mother and father. They even took new names: Sarah and Abraham. They became the mother and father of all the Jewish and Christian peoples.

**Story-Review Game** (5-25 minutes)

**Child of Abraham**

Children play a variation of Sardines that affirms their spiritual descent from Sarah and Abraham.

Ask one volunteer to be the first *child of Abraham*. As the other children cover their eyes, this child takes the star and hides somewhere in the room.

At your signal the other children look for the child. Anyone who finds the child becomes another *child of Abraham* and squeezes next to the first child, not telling that the child has been found. Play continues until all the *children of Abraham* are squeezed together in the same hiding place.

If you don’t have enough room for this game, substitute a game of Musical Chairs, with these variations:
- All children who are seated are *children of Abraham*.
- No one gets left out. As chairs are removed, children pile onto one another’s laps.
- At the end of the game, all the *children of Abraham* are seated on one chair together!

Repeat the game, using the name *Sarah* instead of Abraham.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Remind children that we are in Lent, a season of deeper prayer. Explain:
- Abraham and Sarah both listened to God when they prayed.
- We can listen to God when we pray, too.
- Some people feel they hear actual words when they listen to God. Many people hear silence.
- Sometimes people feel close to God when they hear this silence. Other people feel far away from God.
- Whatever you hear or feel when you pray or listen to God is fine. Let’s listen in silence together.

After 1 minute pray:
- Thank you, God, for being with Abraham, with Jesus and with us. Help us to listen for your voice today and every day. *Amen.*

**Note:** Distribute this week’s *At Home with the Good News* to children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.
Welcome the Good News  
(10-15 minutes)
On page 1 of today’s Welcome the Good News, children will find another version of today’s Old Testament story.

On page 2 children will find an activity that encourages them to reflect on the gifts given to us, just as God gave the gifts of home and family to Sarah and Abraham. Children will also find a With Your Family activity they can lead at home or practice in the group.

Singing Together  
(5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:

- “God Makes Promises” (p. 28 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)
- “Friends with God” (p. 32 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)

Gospel Story  
(5-10 minutes)
The Mysterious Evening
Late one evening Jesus came to three of his friends. “Will you come with me?” asked Jesus.

“Yes!” said Peter, James and John.

Together they hiked up a high mountain. At the top they stopped to rest. The cool air felt good on their hot faces.

The sky was dark, but suddenly Peter saw a shining light. He blinked, then said, “It’s Jesus! Look, his clothes are dazzling white!”

“And he’s not alone!” said James. He pointed to where Jesus was standing, talking to two men.

“But those are Moses and Elijah!” said John. “How can that be? Those leaders of our people have been dead for hundreds of years.”

Jesus’ friends felt frightened. What strange things were happening on this mountain top?

Art  
(10-25 minutes)
Story-Review Pictures
Activity Soundtrack: Play John L. Bell’s “The Summons.” (Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Children make single-color pictures of scenes from today’s stories. Using only one crayon invites children to use the material with more creative intention.

Explain:

- In today’s Old Testament story, from one man and from one woman came a whole family of people.
- In today’s gospel story, Jesus promises that from his one life God will save the whole world.
- In today’s art activity, we’re going to use one crayon to create a whole picture.

Invite the children to choose a single color of crayon, first to explore different coloring techniques and then to draw scenes from one of today’s stories. Directions to the children:

- Choose one crayon. Pick a favorite color, because this is the only crayon you will use in this activity.
- Choose one color of paper. Pick a color that you think will look good with your crayon. Take two sheets of this colored paper.
◆ Put one sheet of paper aside for later. On the other paper, see how many different ways you can find to draw with your single crayon.

Pause briefly after each of these directions:
◆ Make your lines as hard as you can. Now make softer lines. Now draw as softly as you can.
◆ Make thin lines. Make thick lines. Peel off paper and draw with the side of your crayon.
◆ Draw four circles. Fill in one with scribbling. Fill in one with dots. Fill in one with a single line. Pick a new way to fill in the last one.

Ask children to take the sheets of paper that were set aside. Ask each child to use his or her crayon to draw one scene from today’s story. Encourage the children to use their single crayons in as many different ways as possible in the pictures.

☐ Literature (10-15 minutes)
Porter’s “Another Sarah"
Invite children to listen to Anne Porter’s poem about an apple tree in early spring. First, without introduction, simply read the poem. We suggest you omit the poet’s dedication of the poem “for Christopher Smart.”

Another Sarah
For Christopher Smart

When winter was half over
God sent three angels to the apple tree
Who said to her
“Be glad, you little rack
Of empty sticks,
Because you have been chosen.
“In May you will become
A wave of living sweetness
A nation of white petals
A dynasty of apples.”


Pause for a moment then explain:
◆ These words are what the writer said about an apple tree without any leaves yet.
◆ If we saw a tree with no leaves and no flowers and no fruit, we might not know that it could give us baskets of juicy, sweet apples to eat.
◆ Listen for the words that promise flowers and fruit as I read the poem again.

Read the poem again. Invite children to tell you how they heard about flowers or fruit in the poem. Although the phrases “white petals” and “apples” are two factual answers, accept the children’s own responses. Poetry, like scripture, invites us to make personal and imaginative responses when we listen to it. Finally you can ask:
◆ If you saw a tree without any leaves or flowers or fruit, what would you want to do for it?

INFO
Children and the Lectionary
Today’s Session tells two stories. In the Old Testament, Abraham and Sarah show themselves to be faithful and obedient. In the Gospel, Jesus takes his disciples to a mountain before beginning his journey to Jerusalem, a journey that will end in his death on a cross. In today’s session children explore the theme of obedience in both stories.

INFO
Where You’ll Find Everything Else
◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
   — Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
   — This week’s Bible Skills for Third Graders activity.
   — This week’s At Home with the Good News, to distribute or email to group members.
◆ Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
   — Information on Spring-B’s Models of the Faith.
   — For catechists and/or families, an article titled Season of Lent.
   — For catechists and/or families, an article titled Covenants.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings call us to trust in God’s faithfulness. In Genesis, God affirms his faithfulness to Abraham. Paul assures the Romans that God is totally and absolutely “for us.” In the gospel account of the transfiguration, Elijah, Moses—and the voice of God—endorse the completeness of God’s revelation in Jesus.

**Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18**

The account of Isaac’s offering comes as the climax of the story of Abraham’s relationship with God. At God’s command, Abraham has already cut himself off from his past, from country and family, and retains only the promise of new status. Now God commands him to cut off his future by killing the heir of the promise, his beloved son Isaac—and no new promise is given.

The story is simply told, without direct expression of the thoughts or feelings of the participants. Its power comes from the events and relationships themselves. The story centers upon the exemplary faith of Abraham and the God-tested strength of the bond between God and Abraham.

Abraham demonstrates his faithfulness by his readiness to act in obedience, trusting in God’s faithfulness to the promise instead of trying to take matters into his own hands to make God’s plans work out.

**Romans 8:31b-34**

Today’s reading, cast in the form of a public debate, uses ironic questions and parallel phrases. Paul assures the Roman Christians that they have nothing to fear, for Christ’s crucifixion shows the extent of God’s love toward all believers. God and Christ are “for us” (v. 31). No other authority or force can separate the Christian from God.

In verse 31, Paul refers to Psalm 118:6 and then alludes, by his choice of words, to Abraham’s offering of Isaac as a reflection of God’s offering. For Paul, Psalm 44:22, applied by the rabbis to Jewish martyrs, showed that suffering was the Christian’s lot.

**Mark 9:2-10**

Commentators have interpreted the account of Christ’s transfiguration from a variety of perspectives—from a straightforward report to the narrative of a vision or a mystical experience elaborated by symbolism. Mark’s account is strongly shaped by references to the appearance of God to Moses on Mount Sinai, which likewise was in a cloud on a mountain after “six days” (Exodus 24:15-18). Moses was also transfigured in Exodus 34:29-35.

The divine voice from the cloud repeats the statement made at Jesus’ baptism (1:11) with the addition of the command “listen to him” (v. 7). As Moses represents the tradition of the Torah, the law, so Elijah represents the prophetic tradition. Both appear with Jesus and then disappear, leaving “only Jesus” (v. 8).

The booths that Peter proposes to build would be like those built in the vineyards at the time of the Feast of Booths (Succoth), the Jewish festival associated at this time with the yearly renewal of the covenant. On the day of salvation, the Lord would again dwell in the midst of the people. But since this time has not yet come, Jesus enjoins the disciples to silence.

The disciples have seen Jesus for a moment in the light in which the Church will see him after the resurrection, but the true nature of the Son of Man would be misunderstood if he were seen only as a divinely acclaimed miracle-worker. Only the crucifixion and resurrection of the suffering Son will reveal the truth.

**Reflection**

We all have our moments. Our clothes may not be radiant, and we may not chat with prophets. But we know the times when we feel most fully like God’s children.

Those experiences will vary: for some, it is the profound touch of music or art. For others, it’s the first sight and embrace of a beloved friend or relative after a long separation. Still others might find fulfillment in social service, worship or nature. Liberation from confinement, whether at school or work, can also lift us beyond the ordinary drudgery. At such times, we know we are at our best. We co-create our identities with God; human and divine delight in each other.

It’s tempting to try to prolong the experience, as Peter did. We dread a long trek down the mountain afterwards, but we have had the vision, setting the
You feel the quickening as your body fails.
Something quite other will be its splendid sweetness.
Behind your bodily eyes you will see its glory burning.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today we learn how God tests Abraham's fidelity.
Having been promised covenant blessings through his only son Isaac, Abraham is now told to sacrifice his son. Against all natural human love for his son (CCC, #2214–2233) and legal prohibitions against murder (CCC, #2258–2330), Abraham undertakes the awful process of killing his son to show how willing he is to do whatever God asks. God responds by saving Isaac and promising again that blessings will come from the covenant relationship. Our fidelity to God's demands will "transfigure" our lives as it does Abraham's.

Liturgies Link

Postures of Prayer

In the synagogues, the reader and the congregation stood for the reading of the Torah. Similarly, in early Christian worship, the people stood for the reading of the gospel.

Sitting was the posture for teaching in the synagogue and early Church. The bishop sat on his chair, as the representative of God enthroned, and preached the tradition—the faith. Everyone else, except those especially weak, stood through the entire service. This custom continues today in Orthodox churches in Europe and the Middle East.

The normal Jewish posture for public prayer was standing with hands and face uplifted. Pictures in the catacombs indicate that this posture was also used by the early Christians. This posture, called orans (Latin for "praying"), came to be seen as the posture of resurrection, for those made worthy to stand before the Lord through baptism.

Kneeling was associated with pagan cults, and the early Church avoided it and used it only for private prayer and for public penitents. The Council of Nicaea in AD 325 forbade kneeling for prayer on Sundays and during the entire Easter season.

In late medieval times, a predominantly penitential approach to the Eucharist became common, and the laity then knelt for the entire service. The orans posture was retained only for the celebrant.

The World of the Bible

Son of Man

In Semitic languages, when connected to a collective noun, "son of" designates the individual member belonging to a group. Thus a son of man means a human person, especially in contrast to God, and so can mean "someone," "anyone" or even be an indirect way of referring to "I myself" or "me."

But this title also takes on a particularly important meaning for Christians because the prophet Daniel (7:13) describes God's final agent, to whom all power is given to accomplish God's rule in the world, as a "son of man."

Jesus also adds further meanings by connecting the Son of Man both with the suffering that is part of his messianic task and with the forgiveness of sins, which only God could do. Thus the title could point to him as just another human person, or as the suffering, sin-forgiving savior or, finally, as God's final triumphant figure brandishing the power of God for the kingdom.