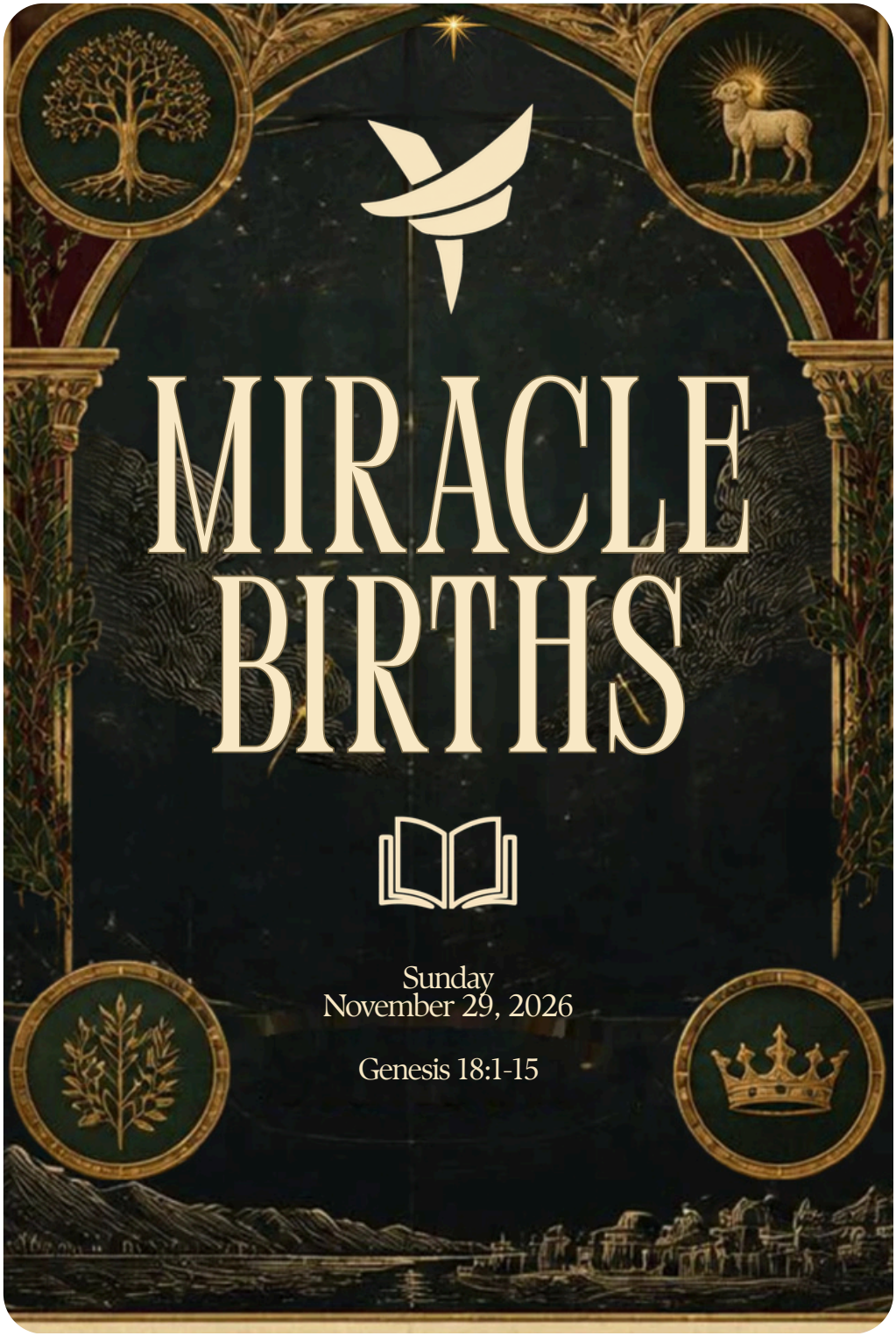

MIRACLE
BIRTHS
Sunday
November 29, 2026
Genesis 18:1-15

Example Teaching Rhythm

Welcome and Connect: 10 Minutes
This helps people feel connected and more comfortable participating in the study and discussion.
Look Forward: 5-10 Minutes
Share any important church events, service opportunities, or upcoming group plans. Keep this brief but clear.
Look at Scripture: 25-35 Minutes
This is the main focus of Community Groups. Read the selected scripture together and guide the group through discussion questions and observations.
Prayer: 10 Minutes
Invite members to share prayer requests and praises, then pray together as a group. This is a time to support one another.

Explaining the H.E.A.R Method

The acronym **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond.** Each of these four steps aims to cultivate an atmosphere to hear God speak.

Highlight - After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, read the passage of scripture, and highlight each verse that speaks to you.
Explain - Explain what the text means. Ask questions like:

- Who wrote this, to whom, and why? What does this reveal about God? What do the key words actually mean? What did this call the original audience to, and what does that reveal for me?

By asking questions, with the help of God's Spirit, and by using helpful study resources, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.
Apply - Application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, work to uncover the significance of these verses and the implications they have. Ask questions like:

- What does this passage reveal about God, yourself, or the world that you need to embrace or sit with? Does this passage challenge an attitude, assumption, or habit that needs to change? Is there something to do? Is there someone to love?

Respond - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. Ask: Is there something to pray? – Let the passage shape your prayer, not just inform it. Use the "Five Daily Prayer Prompts" to guide you in your response.

Promised

God hears even our unspoken doubt, keeps His appointments, and fulfills every promise in Christ.

Introduction

Before Isaac was born, God picked his name. It means "he laughs."

Sit with that for a second. God could have chosen a name that meant blessing, or rescue, or answered prayer. He chose a laugh. And not just the happy kind. Tsachaq, the Hebrew verb behind the name, works on both sides of a line. It can be the laugh of pure delight, and it can be the laugh of someone who is sure you must be joking. Genesis uses it both ways. In chapter 17, Abraham is on his face, laughing at the promise. In chapter 18, Sarah is behind a tent flap, laughing at it with her mouth shut. God hears them both, and the name stays.

Compare Ishmael, born a chapter earlier. His name means "God hears," and his mother received it in the desert in the middle of her misery (Genesis 16:11). Isaac's name means "he laughs," and today's passage is the day God shows that He hears that one too.

Think how ridiculous it sounded. A man of ninety-nine, a woman close to ninety, and a nursery. God did not wait until someone could say the promise with a straight face. He spoke it into a household where it was funny, and then let the baby's name keep the joke on the record.

That is where Advent really starts. Before the candles and the carols, there was a promise that sounded ridiculous: a Savior from a town nobody noticed, laid in a feeding trough. Every birth in this series begins with someone who had good reason to doubt or to weep, and Isaac comes first because his story shows what God does with the laughter.

Our word today is Promised, and the passage turns on one question: what kind of God is doing the promising?

Hold this one as we read: what has God said that you have started treating as a figure of speech?

Discussion Questions + Illustration

Select a question or two below to open up discussion.

- What is the last thing you told someone you would do, and then quietly let slide? What made it so easy to let go?
- A stranger offers you something that sounds too good to be true. What would you need to see before you believed them?
- Which is harder for you to receive from God: a hard word or a good one?
- What is the longest "any day now" you have ever lived in? What did you do with the waiting?
- When people laugh at what you hope for, what does that do to the hope?

July 1948. The Soviets have sealed off Berlin, and American pilot Gail Halvorsen is flying supplies into a city running short of everything. He stops at the fence beside Tempelhof airfield, where about thirty children stand quietly watching the planes. He has two sticks of gum in his pocket. He tears them in half and passes the pieces through the wire, and the children pass the wrappers around just to smell them. Then he makes a promise: more tomorrow. One child asks how they will know which plane is his. "I'll wiggle the wings." The next day he does, and small handkerchief parachutes of candy come drifting down. Letters addressed to "Uncle Wiggly Wings" start arriving, and other pilots on the airlift join him.

- The children had a stranger's word, a sign to watch for, and a piece of gum already in their hands. What does a small first installment do to your willingness to believe the rest?

Highlight | Genesis 18:1-15

Read this one like a detective. There are three things to hunt for.

First, count the voices. Verse 1 says the LORD appeared. Verse 2 says three men. By verse 9, “they” are asking where Sarah is, and they already know her name. In verse 10 it narrows to one voice: “He said.” By verse 13 it is plainly “the LORD said.” The narrator told us who this was in the first line (two of the three are angels bound for Sodom, 18:22 and 19:1; one is the LORD Himself), but Abraham sees dusty travelers. He bows, runs to meet them, and says “my lord” (v. 3), singular, to three men. Then he hurries to serve a tender calf and three seahs of fine flour, a meal fit for royalty. How much he grasped, the text never says.

Second, watch the clock. It is “the heat of the day,” when nothing is supposed to happen, and Abraham is just sitting at his tent door. Then two time stamps arrive: “about this time next year” and “at the appointed time.” Sarah has measured her life in years that came up empty. God measures out one.

Third, find what no one could see. Sarah is listening at the tent door behind him (v. 10), and she laughs “to herself” (v. 12), with her mouth shut. Listen to what she says inside: “shall I have pleasure?” That sounds like a woman who has trained herself to stop hoping. The visitor knows anyway (v. 13). Then slow down on verse 15. She is afraid, and so she lies to God’s face.

- If a visitor answered something you had only thought, how would it change the way you listened to everything he said next?
- Sarah is afraid and lies. What do you notice about how God responds?

Explain | Consider the Context

Twenty-five years is a long time to hold a promise. In Genesis 12, God promised Abram a great nation, and in chapter 15 He sealed it in a covenant ceremony. Normally both parties walked between halved animals, each saying, "may this be done to me if I break my word." Abram slept, and only a smoking fire pot and torch passed through: God took the penalty on Himself. In chapter 17, the promise got a name, Isaac, a date, next year, and Sarah as the mother. Abraham heard that on his face, and he laughed. Chapter 18 brings the promise to Sarah herself.

Notice what God does with her laugh. He quotes her to her husband, with an edit. She said, "my lord is old." He reports her as saying, "I am old." The jab disappears; the laugh stays. When she denies it, He neither flatters her nor casts her off: "No, but you did laugh." Then He asks the question the whole passage hangs on: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

In Genesis 21, Sarah says, "God has made laughter for me," and Hebrews 11:11 says she "considered him faithful." Later, at Moriah, God swore by Himself to guarantee every promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:16; Hebrews 6:13-18). Abraham, who laughed in 17:17, is "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (Romans 4:21). Laughter did not cancel the promise.

- If God handles doubt this carefully, why do we work so hard to hide it?
- Abraham's part was to be fully convinced. What is the difference between being convinced and being certain?

Apply | Discuss as a Group

Most of us have gotten good at a polite kind of doubt. We say amen, we sing the song, and we keep a back door open in case it does not pan out. Sarah's laugh is that same doubt without the manners, and the gift of the passage is that God heard it and stayed in the conversation with her. He knows the version of your doubt you would never say out loud, and He still keeps speaking to you.

Doubt left alone does not stay quiet. It starts making plans. Abraham and Sarah tried to help God along through Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16), and it cost them. Ishmael's birth came from Sarai's impatience, and the rivalry that followed shadows Genesis 21. Every shortcut we call faith begins the same way: a real promise, a slow clock, and a plan of our own.

That is the sorting job in front of us. Some of what we call God's promises are His, and some are ours. His come with a speaker and a text: He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5), He will finish what He started (Philippians 1:6), He will return (John 14:3). Ours usually carry a deadline we set ourselves, as Sarai's plan did. A promise we invented will eventually fail us, and it teaches us to doubt the real ones too. Even the real ones were not all addressed to us, so find the speaker, the first hearers, and the purpose before you claim one.

- Where do you keep a back door open when you say amen? What would it cost you to close it?
- Which hope have you been calling a promise? Find what God actually said about it, and see how much of it remains.
- Where have you tried to help God along? What did it cost, and what would waiting on Him have looked like instead?

Respond | How should I live/pray?

Advent is four weeks of practice at waiting, and waiting is where most of us drift. We stay busy, we stop praying specifically, and we quietly lower our expectations. A promise you never revisit becomes a promise you forget. Abraham and Sarah's wait ran from Genesis 12 to Genesis 21. What you do inside the wait matters, so here is a plan.

First, pick one promise God has actually made. Write it on a card and put it where you will see it first thing: the bathroom mirror, your lock screen, the front of your Bible. Second, read it aloud every morning this Advent. Third, ask one question: if this is true, what is the next small thing it asks of me today? For Abraham, it was a meal for strangers. For you, it might be a phone call, an apology you have been putting off, or a prayer you stopped praying in February. Then go do that one thing. Do it before lunch, while the promise is still fresh.

Do not run this alone. Tell one person in your group which promise you picked, and ask them to check on you each Sunday through Advent. Pick someone who will ask, not just nod. Over the next three weeks, we will meet a baby in a basket, a boy set apart by a Nazirite vow, and a child handed over to a priest, each showing what a held promise looks like.

Here is why you can build on this. Paul says the "offspring" of Abraham's promise is Christ (Galatians 3:16), and that every promise of God finds its Yes in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). God did not leave it as a rumor. He gave shepherds a sign: a baby in a feeding trough (Luke 2:12). Like the first piece of gum through the fence, the manger is a down payment, and the rest is coming. He has said so: "Surely I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20).

- Which promise will you hold this week, and where will you put it?
- Who could you invite to your table before Christmas, someone for whom the invitation might be a sign?

Response Tool: Five Daily Prayer Prompts

As you leave today, let these five questions carry the weight of your response into the week ahead — not as a checklist, but as an ongoing conversation with God. Introduce the five daily questions as a simple spiritual practice that can help us intentionally live out our faith in our workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

- God, where do you want me to go?
- God, who do you want me to see?
- God, what do you want me to say?
- God, what do you want me to pray?
- God, how do you want me to serve?

After this time of reflection, transition into a time of prayer requests. Allow time for members to share and, if appropriate, allow others in the class to pray for each other.

Additional Commentary

- On mo'ed (מועד), "appointed time" (v.14): from ya'ad, "to appoint, to meet." The same noun names the tent of meeting and Israel's set festivals (Lev 23:2), and recurs in 17:21 and 21:2. The fulfillment arrives on the named schedule: an appointment, not a deadline.

- On pala' (פלא), "too hard" (v.14): yippale' is the niphal, "to be extraordinary, beyond ordinary reach," the vocabulary of God's wonders (Ps 77:14; Jer 32:17, 27). In Judges 13:18, the angel says his name is pil'i, "wonderful," and Isaiah 9:6 calls the coming child pele' Counselor. A word for what exceeds human reach ends up naming a person.

- On davar (דבר), "anything" (v.14): the noun means both "word" and "thing," so the question can be heard two ways: is any matter too wonderful for the LORD, or any word of His too wonderful to carry out? Gabriel's "nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37) echoes the Greek translation of this verse, widely read as deliberate.

- On ka'et chayyah (כעת חיה), "about this time next year" (vv.10, 14): a difficult phrase, with "at the time of life" and "when the season comes round" both defensible. The same phrase appears in 2 Kings 4:16-17, when Elisha tells the Shunammite woman she will hold a son: two miracle births, announced in the same words.

- On zaqen (זקן), "old" (vv.12-13): Sarah says 'adoni zaqen, "my lord is old"; God reports 'ani zaqanti, "I have grown old." Rabbinic tradition read the shift as God altering the report for the sake of peace in the home (b. Yevamot 65b).

- On epangelia (ἐπαγγελία), "promise": Paul's word in Romans 4:13-21 and Galatians 3:16-18, an announcement of what the speaker himself will do. Genesis 21:1 states the same idea with the verb dibber: the LORD did for Sarah "as he had promised." That is why Paul can set promise against inheritance by law: God granted the inheritance to Abraham through a promise (Gal 3:18).

Community Group Resource Page

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From Community Group training and resources to Discipleship Group starter guides, we want to equip you to make disciples.

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