



## Promises at the Crossroads of History and Hope

*Abraham*

### Warm-up Question

*When is a time when it was difficult for you to trust a promise?*

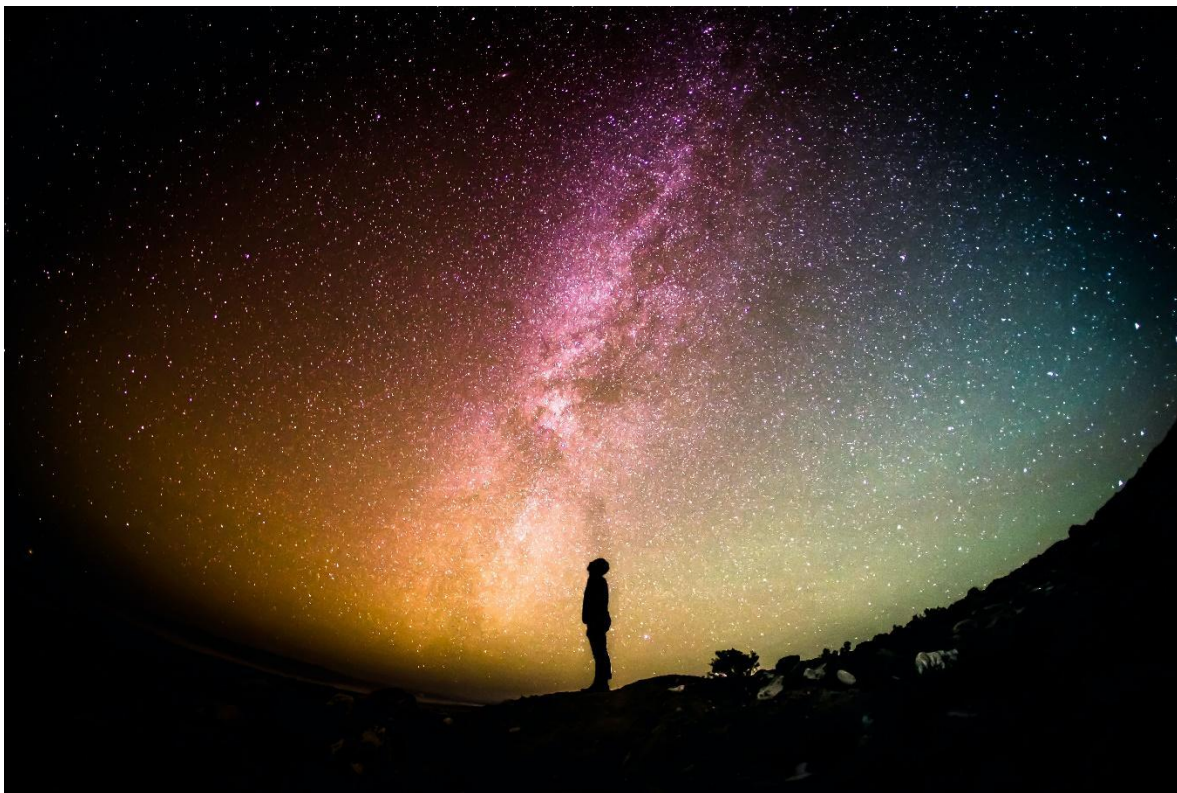


Photo by [Greg Rakozy](#) on [Unsplash](#)

### Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

## God Calls and Covenants

Primary Reading [Genesis 15](#)      Secondary Readings [Genesis 12:4-9](#); [Genesis 17:1-14](#)

### Bible Story Reflection

Promises, promises - they are a part of the everyday rhythm of our lives. They make up the social contract of society, of being a community of many and various people. We (often without speaking) promise to be honest, be kind, respect others, not take what is not ours, to do what we say we will do, etc. Other promises are intentionally spoken out loud for particular reasons and in and through particular relationships. In a court of law, we promise to tell the truth. In a marriage, we promise to be committed to our partner. As sponsors in Holy Baptism, we promise to accompany another in the life of faith. Promises – both large and small – mark our lives.

Likewise, the story of Abraham is full of promises. In fact, without the promises, there really isn't a story. The story begins with a command and promises from God. "Go, and I will," God says. The rest of the story is all about what God promises, Abraham waiting for those promises, and God, in God's time, fulfilling those promises. But it isn't an easy road. The promises are not realized right away. In fact, it takes a good long time.

While he is still called Abram (not Abraham yet), this man who has been called by God begins to wonder when and how God will make good on what God has promised. After all, God promised descendants, and Abram and Sarai are advancing in years without children. In response to his questions, God does two things. First, God gives Abram something to look at to help him understand the words of God's promise. God tells him to look at the stars, and God assures him that his descendants will be that many. Whenever he doubts, he can look at the stars again and remember God's promise. Second, God "cuts the covenant." God gives Abram a physical sign that what God has unconditionally promised, God will do. Whenever Abram wonders if the promise is true, he can remember that action of God and trust that what God has said God will do, God will accomplish.

Our own lives of faith are also marked by both promises and ways to remember those promises. Like Abraham, God has given tangible gifts that help us trust in God's promises, too. In Holy Baptism, God claims us as God's own, marks us with the cross of Christ, and seals us with the Holy Spirit. Remembering our baptism by touching water, marking ourselves with the sign of the cross, and speaking aloud God's promises is a way for us to hold onto God's promises for us: what God has promised is trustworthy and true. In Holy Communion, Jesus comes to us in, with, and under bread and wine, giving us forgiveness, life, and salvation. Whenever we participate in this meal, we taste again God's unconditional promises and can remember anew that what God has said and done in Jesus, what God has promised in Jesus, is indeed a dependable promise for us.

### Discussion Questions

1. Abram set out on nothing but the promises of God. What do you think this was like?
2. Sometimes it was hard for Abraham to trust God's promises. Talk about a time when it has been hard for you to trust God's promises.
3. How do you think it helped Abraham to "look at the stars?"
4. How does remembering your baptism regularly help you in your life of faith?
5. When God "cuts the covenant" with Abram, God makes an unconditional promise to him. That's what God does for you in Jesus. What does this mean for you and your life?
6. At times, Abraham grew impatient with God. Talk about a time when you got impatient with God.
7. How do you think Abraham would tell his story?
8. How does Abraham's story remind us that God keeps God's promises? What does this mean for you?
9. To what are you being called through Abraham's story?
10. To what is your congregation or faith community being called through Abraham's story?

### Activity Suggestions

Do a remembrance of baptism activity, either alone or in a group. Dip your hands in water. Mark the sign of the cross on your forehead, and say these words: *I am God's beloved child. In Jesus, God has promised to love me forever. This promise is trustworthy and true.*

Use cut-out magazine images and words. Make a collage that represents God's promises to you and the ways that you live in relationship to those promises. In your collage, represent specific experiences as well as ideas or concepts like "doubt" and "trust."

For young children: Read [Psalm 105:1-11](#) from a child-friendly translation. If it is nighttime and you live in a place without light pollution, go outside and look at the stars. If it is daytime, go outside and (depending on where you live and the season) look at the blades of grass, the snow, the sand on the beach, the leaves on a tree, etc. Be creative as you find something in nature to "repeat" what God did for Abraham. Talk about how God knows we need "more than words" to trust God's promises. Help them each remember their baptism.

### Prayer Concerns

Those who doubt, astronomers and those who study space, those making promises today, those preparing for Holy Baptism or Affirmation of Baptism

### Closing Prayer

Help me, O God, to hear you call upon my life and trust in your promises for me and for your whole creation. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.