



Promises at the crossroads of history and hope

Hagar

Warm-up Question

Talk about a time when you experienced the presence of God.



Photo by [olena ivanova](#) 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 Sees and Sets Free

Primary Reading [Genesis 16](#)

Secondary Reading [Genesis 21:8-21](#)

Bible Story Reflection

**It is tragic that Hagar's story was one of several biblical stories that were used during the era of slavery to hold in bondage those seeking their freedom. A faithful reckoning with this text must acknowledge that God's command to Hagar to return to Sarai is neither a justification of nor a mandate for slavery.*

To enter into Hagar's story is to enter into the complexity of the human experience and the divine-human relationship. Hers is a significant story with several unique details that, unfortunately, sometimes gets overlooked. Hagar, an outsider, is the first biblical woman to receive a promise from God about her child (Genesis 12:10-12). She is the only person in the entire Bible to name God (Genesis 16:13). She is the first biblical person who is enslaved to be set free (Genesis 21:8-21). When Abraham casts Hagar and Ishmael out of his house, they gain their freedom.

This is all the more noteworthy because Hagar is a woman whose life is shaped by a patriarchal, hierarchical system. She is Egyptian and she is a slave in the household of Abram, under Sarai's control. It is quite possible that during Abram and Sarai's sojourn in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20), Hagar was acquired, perhaps even gifted to Sarai from the Pharaoh. Some scholars assume that prior to her enslavement she was a daughter of the royal house because of the later references to Ishmael's sons as princes (Genesis 17:20; 21:16).

And woven through all of this is an intimacy with God that is rarely paralleled in the biblical story. This intimacy reveals that God's love both transcends and transgresses human boundaries. The circumstances of individual people's lives matter to God. God sees people in their suffering. And God moves toward justice, liberation, and blessing. In such a way, Hagar calls us to both see God in her story and see in our own lives what might need to be confronted and dismantled as we strive to be a people of reconciliation and beloved community.

Hagar encounters several crossroads of history and hope in her story - taken into slavery, becoming pregnant, running away, encountering God, returning, giving birth, being cast out, being saved and set free. At each of these crossroads, God was present, and the recounting of them reminds us of the same for our lives.

Discussion Questions

1. What have you previously thought or understood about Hagar?
2. What surprises you about Hagar's story?
3. How would Hagar tell her own story?
4. What new perspectives does Hagar bring to your thoughts about the Christian "origin stories?"
5. Hagar had a deeply personal experience of God's presence. What does this mean for you?
6. When have you experienced God's presence?
7. Hagar names God, "God sees." What does it mean for your life of faith that God sees you?

8. We often focus on the tragedy of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham's household, and it is tragic. However, in that tragedy, they gain their freedom. What is the significance of this perspective in this story?
9. In what ways does Hagar encourage us to "hear all the voices in the room?"
10. How does Hagar's story remind us that God moves toward justice?
11. To what are you being called through Hagar's story?
12. To what is your congregation or faith community being called through Hagar's story?

Activity Suggestions

Look at this image of Hagar speaking with the angel.

What do you see?

What do you feel?

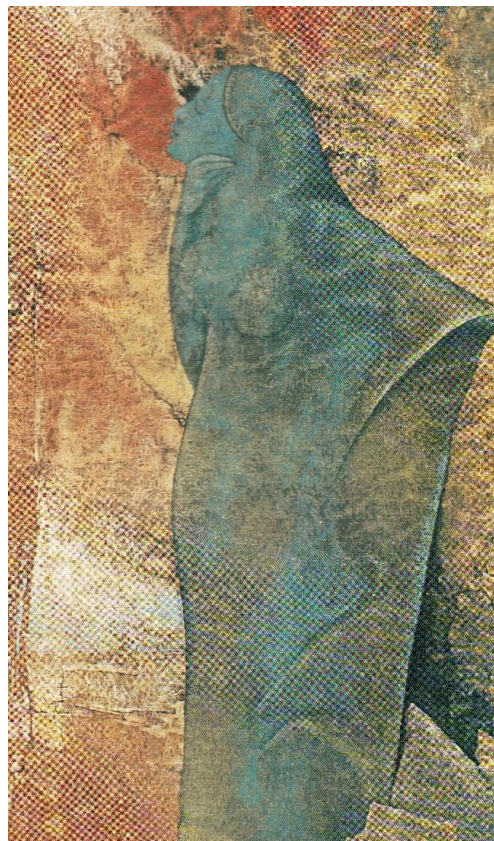
What does it communicate?

What stories or experiences from your life does it bring to mind?

If you are with a group, discuss. If you are by yourself, spend some time in reflection.

Wesley, Frank, 1923-2002. Hagar Speaking with the Angel, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=59241> [retrieved December 22, 2023]. Original source: Estate of Frank Wesley, http://www.frankwesleyart.com/main_page.htm.



Keep a journal for the next week, paying special attention to when, where, and how you experience God's presence.

Have an intentional conversation with someone who is in some way different from you. Intentionally seek to listen to understand.

God sees you and looks upon you with care and compassion. Spend an extended time looking in the mirror. Reflect upon what God sees – what is visible "on the outside" and what is hidden "on the inside." Close your time with this affirmation to yourself: *God, the Creator of the universe, sees me, looks upon me with love and compassion, and is moving in my life toward justice, liberation, and blessing. In the name of +Jesus. Amen.*

For young children: Adapt the above. God sees you and looks upon you with care and compassion. Have each child look in the mirror. Talk about what they see in the mirror. Talk about God sees when God looks at us – what is visible "on the outside" and what is hidden "on the inside." Close your time with this blessing. Have the children "repeat after me." *God, the Creator of the universe, sees me. God looks at me with love. God looks at me with care. God blesses me. In the name of +Jesus. Amen.*

Prayer Concerns

Victims of human trafficking, women in abusive relationships, those who do not feel seen, shelter and relief workers, inter-religious dialogue, the war between Israel and Hamas

Closing Prayer

Look kindly upon me, O God, and set me free from all that oppresses me. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

