

**Goal:** To reflect on how we celebrate and praise God when God helps us.

### Connecting with the Biblical Text

The two verses from Exodus 15 end the escape from Pharaoh and his army, as the people of God safely crossed the Reed (Red) Sea. These two verses also tell us something else. Miriam was considered to be a prophet as were her brothers, Moses and Aaron. She is first known for playing an important role in saving the life of the baby Moses (Exodus 2:1-10). Later, Exodus 15:20-21 places her in a different light. After a long victory song by Moses and an explanation of the event, Miriam and the women sing an additional song of victory. These two verses are considered to be the oldest writings of the exodus. According to verse 21, Miriam is the author of this couplet extolling the victory. Since she leads this ritual dance of celebration, it also indicates that women were involved in important rituals and celebrations. The presence of Miriam in this story paves the way for other women prophets in the Old Testament, such as Huldah (2 Kings 22:14) and Deborah (Judges 4:4).

For more historical information about Miriam, visit [bit.ly/GLMiriam](http://bit.ly/GLMiriam).

### Connecting with the World

- How are national victories celebrated today? Is our country so divided that we are unable to agree on what constitutes a victory of any kind? When was the last victory that we celebrated across the land, coming together as one people?
- Although Miriam is clearly shown as a leader among the Israelites and is performing an act commonly done by women, she might be considered acting in a nontraditional role for women in the Bible. Women have broken many

of the glass ceilings in primarily male-dominated professions and trades in recent decades. Yet most of us are surprised when a woman plumber or electrician shows up. What do you think it will take for assumptions such as these to be eliminated?

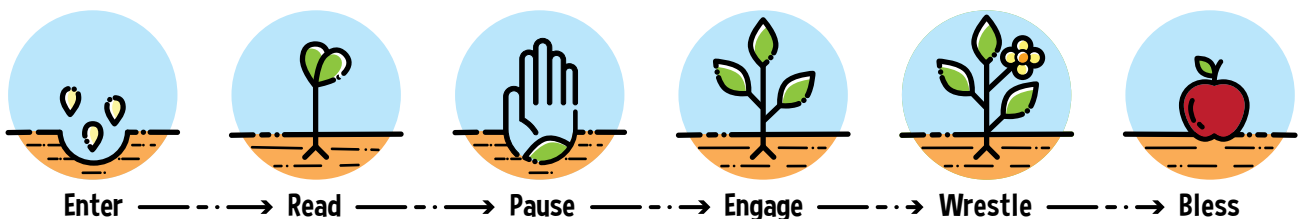
### Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Life within the congregation should be filled with joy, the joy expressed by Miriam and the other women after the Hebrews crossed the Reed (Red) Sea. Our struggle as leaders and parents is to express that joy so that children can join in. Or perhaps we adults need to watch how children express joy and follow their lead. Every so often one sees a child in a choir singing with joy and energy, with their whole body absorbing the music. How can we, young and old alike, build on that spirited expression of praising God?

### Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

- Miriam and the other Hebrew women expressed their joy at crossing the Reed Sea safely dancing and praising God with music. Another way to express joy and praise is through writing. As you prepare for this session, write a few sentences each day that praise and thank God for some delight in your life.
- This Bible story focuses on a great event, but our lives are filled with smaller moments that elicit happiness, such as seeing a bright red cardinal at the bird feeder or hearing a three-year-old say hi to get your attention. Give thanks for those moments when they happen.

*God of love and joy, open our whole beings to show you praise. Amen.*



## Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✦ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✦ Floor cushions, a blanket, or carpet squares
- ✦ Celebratory centerpiece
- ✦ Coloring supplies
- ✦ Cards cut from card-stock copies of Resource Page 1
- ✦ Internet-connected device
- ✦ 6" x 9" pieces of neutral or light, solid-colored fabric—1 per child
- ✦ Fabric or standard markers
- ✦ Twine or string
- ✦ Stapler
- ✦ *Sugar in Milk* by Thrity Umrigar and Khoa Le (Running Press Kids, 2020) or internet-connected device
- ✦ *Fly, Girl, Fly!: Shaesta Waiz Soars around the World* by Nancy Roe Pimm and Alexandra Bye (Beaming Books, 2020) or internet-connected device
- ✦ Mural paper

## Preparing to Lead

This is the first of three sessions about different celebrations of God's people. In this session, Miriam sings a song in celebration and praises God for delivering God's people out of slavery and keeping them safe. In this story, the celebration is about freedom and trusting that God would deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians. As you begin to prepare for this session, think about times when people hold celebrations for being freed or rescued from something.

- ✦ Who are the people who have led these celebrations?
- ✦ What kind of thing happens during them?
- ✦ What are the ways God is celebrated and thanked in this story?
- ✦ What might children notice about this passage?

Read the story "Miriam at the Reed Sea" from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, page 58. Next, read Exodus 15:20–21 in your Bible. For a better understanding of the context of the story, read chapters 14 and 16 as well.

Miriam is the one who leads the celebrations. She was a leader in her own right, called by God to help lead

God's people. Think about where the children might see themselves within a story such as this one. Be aware that you will have children from different backgrounds, and even though celebrating is something everyone can understand, each child will understand it differently from within their own context.

As you finish preparing for your time together, take a moment and pray for the children you will be working with. Is there anything you need to do so that all feel welcome and can participate?

Review the freedom songs suggested on the following two YouTube playlists: "Playlist of Songs about Freedom" ([bit.ly/GLFreedomSongsPlaylist1](https://bit.ly/GLFreedomSongsPlaylist1)) and "Juneteenth Freedom Songs" ([bit.ly/GLFreedomSongsPlaylist2](https://bit.ly/GLFreedomSongsPlaylist2)). Choose two or more songs to play during the session. Note that all the songs on these playlists have not been vetted, so watch the entire video so that you are comfortable with your song choices.

Arrange seating in a circle using floor cushions, a blanket, or carpet squares so that the children can see each other. In the middle of the space, have a celebratory centerpiece as your focal point during the gathering time, such as something that might be seen on a table at a birthday party or other celebration where people gather together.



### Enter into sacred space together.

As children enter the space, greet them by name. If you have new participants, make sure to ask their names.

- ✦ Provide cards cut from card-stock copies of Resource Page 1 and coloring supplies. Invite the children to decorate their card with colors, designs, or words that show how they would like to celebrate something. When they are finished, invite the children to find a place in the circle to sit comfortably on the floor cushions, blanket, or carpet squares. Ask them to bring their decorated cards with them.
- ✦ Once all are seated, invite the children to take turns introducing themselves and telling about the decorations or words they put on their cards that show how they like to celebrate.

Tell the children that in today's story praises to God were sung in celebration. Comment that in church

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we often celebrate God with songs of praise as well. Invite the children to sing a hymn often sung in worship, “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow,” also known as the Doxology.

Familiarize the children with the words by having them repeat each line after you. Note that in the version below, expansive language for God is used rather than the traditional words.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
praise God, all creatures here below;  
praise God, above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then sing together, either without accompaniment or using the YouTube video “Old Hundredth—Hymn Piano” ([bit.ly/GLDoxologyInstrumental](https://bit.ly/GLDoxologyInstrumental), 0:37).



### Read a story of God's people.

Open *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* to page 58. Share the images with the children and ask them to describe what they see.

Read the story aloud to the children. Comment that Miriam and the women were praising God by dancing and celebrating God's deliverance of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt.



### Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Invite the children to a brief time of silent reflection by encouraging them to think about the experiences the Israelites must have had and what this feeling of freedom might have been like.

Share that throughout the sessions they will be talking about celebrations.



### Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Invite the children further explore the story using the following prompts:

- Why were the Israelites trying to get out of Egypt?
- How difficult do you think the journey was for them? Why?
- Why do you think that Miriam decided to dance and sing to celebrate and praise God?

- What are some ways you celebrate and give thanks to God?
- Comment that when we celebrate God helping us, we are also praising God for God's help and for keeping God's promise to never leave us.

Choose one or both options:

#### ○ Celebrating Passover

- The Jewish people have celebrated the event freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt in a celebration called Passover. Learn more about Passover by showing the YouTube video “Passover for Kids—5-13 April—How Do We Celebrate Passover?—Twinkl USA.” ([bit.ly/GLPassoverForKids](https://bit.ly/GLPassoverForKids), 3:47).
- Engage the children in a conversation about the video using the following prompts:
  - What were the reasons for celebrating Passover?
  - What were some of the things you thought were interesting about how the holiday is celebrated?
  - What do you think is important to remember about Passover?

#### ○ Celebration Music

- One of the important parts of the story of Miriam is that she sang to God as part of her celebration of freedom. Invite the children to recall their thoughts from their time of silent reflection about how the Israelites might have felt being freed from slavery in Egypt.
- Tell the children that you will show several videos of freedom songs. Encourage the children to listen to the messages and the feelings expressed in the songs and pictures.
- Show the videos you have chosen. Then engage the children in conversation about what they heard and saw in these videos. Wonder when and who might sing or listen to these songs. Ask the children how these songs made them feel.



### Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Using the following questions, or ones of your own, talk together about ways that we, and others, celebrate as a response to God's help in our lives.

- If you could ask Miriam a question, what would it be?

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- ✦ When God's people left Egypt, it was a difficult journey. What are ways that we thank God when we are feeling relief, besides singing and dancing?
- ✦ How might we help others celebrate special days in their lives?

Choose one or both options:

- Prayer Flags
  - ✦ Tell the children that in some cultures, prayer flags are flown to bless property, promote peace among people, and offer prayers that will be carried by the wind. People also use similar flags as decorations to celebrate different occasions.
  - ✦ Invite the children to make a prayer flag to hang in your space. Encourage them to use pictures and/or words that express celebration, freedom, hope, and thanks to God.
  - ✦ Provide 6" x 9" pieces of light or neutral, solid-colored fabric and fabric or standard markers. Encourage the children to orient their flag vertically with the short sides at the top and bottom. Tell them to leave about an inch undecorated at the top so that they can fold their flag over the twine or string when it is ready to be hung.
  - ✦ When the children have finished decorating their flags, lay out a piece of twine or string that is long enough for all the flags to be placed side to side with at least an inch or two between them. Fold the undecorated end of the flag over the twine or string and staple close to the fold.
  - ✦ Hang the prayer flag garland in your space. Invite the children to take turns talking about their prayer flag.
- Learning about Refugees
  - ✦ Tell the children that the Israelites were refugees when they left Egypt for a new home. Explain that there are many people today who are refugees, people who have left their homes and homeland due to war, persecution, or oppression and are seeking better lives. Suggest that one of the ways we can honor and celebrate refugees is by listening to their stories and learning about some of the struggles they face. Read aloud or show the corresponding YouTube video for one or both of the following stories:
    - *Sugar in Milk* by Thrity Umrigar and Khoa Le, or YouTube video "Sugar in Milk by Thrity

Umrigar, a Story about Moving from India to US; a Picture Book Read Aloud" ([bit.ly/GLSugarInMilk](https://bit.ly/GLSugarInMilk), 8:52).

- *Fly, Girl, Fly!: Shaesta Waiz Soars around the World* by Nancy Roe Pimm, or YouTube video "Fly, Girl, Fly!: Shaesta Waiz Soars around the World" by Nancy Roe Pimm" ([bit.ly/GLFlyGirlFly](https://bit.ly/GLFlyGirlFly), 10:39).
- ✦ After the story, talk together about the refugee's experience. Wonder together what it might feel like to be a refugee.



### Bless one another with God's grace.

Gather the children into the circle for a closing prayer as a way of celebrating and praising God for a special time together. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Dear God, /  
help us to dance like Miriam, /  
to sing like God's people, /  
to praise you, /  
and to give you thanks /  
anytime we have a reason to celebrate /  
knowing you are with us. /  
Amen. /



### Grow with more.

- Creating an Exodus Map
  - ✦ Spread a piece of mural paper on the floor or table along with drawing supplies.
  - ✦ Designate one end of the paper as the place where the Israelites left Egypt. Invite the children to draw pyramids or a scene that represents Egypt.
  - ✦ Designate the other end of the paper as the place where the Israelites praised God with Miriam leading them. Invite the children to draw a party scene.
  - ✦ Between the starting point and the celebration point, invite the children to design a road map of things the Israelites may have encountered along the way, such as the desert, the sea, the parting of the sea, and so on.

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