

## Messy Church – April 2021

### Jacob, part 1 (birth to Jacob's ladder)

The activities are:

- 1. Being a twin** – imagine that your sibling was born on the same day as you, just a little bit older (or younger)  
Genesis 25: 19 – 26
- 2. Esau's rights as the first-born son – and how he lost them**  
Genesis 25: 27 – 34 (twice the share of anyone else)  
A bowl – papier mâché or origami
- 3. Esau's blessing as the first-born son – and how he lost it**  
Genesis 27: 1 – 45  
Wig
- 4. Jacob leaves home!**  
Genesis 27: 46 – 28: 5  
Packing for a journey
- 5. Jacob's first night away from home**  
Genesis 28: 10 – 22  
Newspaper ladder

# Stories and Activities

## 1 Being a twin

Imagine that one of your brothers or sisters is exactly the same age as you – you share a birthday: would you like to share your birthday party, your birthday presents, your birthday cake? Would it make a difference if you were the younger or the older twin?

How would you feel if people didn't know which one was you and which was the other twin?

Jacob was a twin. His twin brother was called Esau. Esau was older, so he got all the privileges of being the oldest son, but Jacob was only a few minutes younger. Their parents were Isaac and Rebecca. Rebecca said the babies fought inside her before they were born. There was no confusion about which twin was which – they were not identical twins. Esau was red haired, and as the boys grew up, Esau grew more body hair than Jacob did. They were different in what they liked, as well – Esau liked to be outside, hunting, exploring the countryside; Jacob liked to stay close to home, cooking, giving his mother a hand. Jacob was his mother's favourite, but Isaac preferred Esau, because he liked to eat what Esau brought home from hunting.

**Talk about:** the difference between different members of a family. What happens if you all like different things, even if you are not twins, or you all want to do something different when you go out, or away on holiday?

## 2 Esau's rights as the first born son – and how he lost them: papier mâché or origami bowl

**For the papier mâché bowl you will need:** a round balloon, cling film, newspaper, wallpaper paste (or thin glue), a yogurt or cream pot, or something similar to stand your balloon in, scissors, paint

Blow up the balloon and tie a knot in the end. Stand the balloon with the tied end downwards in your small pot. Put a piece of cling film over the balloon. Tear the newspaper up into squares about three centimetres on a side – you don't have to measure, the pieces shouldn't be too big, or too small. Glue a layer of paper over the top of your balloon, over the cling film, to make a bowl shape, then glue another layer on top of that – make about 4 layers. Leave to dry in a warm place for some time.

When the glue and newspaper are dry, you can let the balloon down – or you can pop it! The balloon will peel away from the cling film, which can then be removed from the bowl. Trim the top edge of the bowl, so it is even, and stick a circle of paper on the bottom to act as a base, so it doesn't wobble. Paint it inside and out.

**For the origami bowl you will need:** a square of paper and something firm to work on.

Follow the instructions provided on the separate sheet.

One evening when Esau and Jacob were in their teens, and Esau had been out hunting, he came home really tired and hungry. He couldn't be bothered to prepare a meal for himself, and when he came into the campsite, he discovered that Jacob had already prepared a meal. Jacob, of course, had made it for himself, not expecting to have to feed Esau as well.

Esau asked Jacob for some of his food, saying that he was starving. Jacob didn't like being the younger son, so he said that he would give Esau some food, if Esau gave him his rights as the first-born son. The first-born son (in those days) got twice the share of his father's possessions as anyone else in the family. And it didn't matter if the first child was a daughter, either. The boys of the family inherited. They also inherited the responsibility to look after their mother and their sisters. Since there were only the two children, Esau and Jacob, Esau would get two-thirds of their father's possessions, and the responsibility for looking after Rebecca, and Jacob would get the other third. What Jacob wanted was to swap his and Esau's shares, so that he got two-thirds and Esau got one third. Esau, tired and hungry, couldn't care less for his share at that moment. He promised Jacob that he would give him the first-son rights, Jacob gave him a bowl of the stew he had cooked, Esau ate it, and went to his own tent. The bible criticises Esau for not valuing his birth right.

**Talk about:** rights and responsibilities – they usually go together. If you have the right to do something, you often have a responsibility to do something else – suppose you are shopping. If you put something in your shopping basket – which you have a right to do – you have a responsibility to pay for it, otherwise it is stealing. We should understand our rights, but also our responsibilities. Did Esau understand what he was giving up, just because he was a little hungry?

### **3 Esau's blessing as the first born son – and how he lost it: wig**

**You will need:** crepe paper (yellow, black or brown if you want it to look like hair, but any colour will do), scissors, Sellotape

Cut a strip of crepe paper long enough to go round your head, and wide enough to go from the top of your head to your shoulders, and Sellotape it into a circle, gathering the top so that it sits nicely on your head – see the separate picture. Cut the bottom edge so that it looks like hair, and trim the part over your face to make a fringe.

Jacob and Esau didn't tell their dad, Isaac, what had happened about Esau's birth right. Some time later, Isaac, who was 60 when the twins were born, and was now feeling his age, and going blind, decided that he should give his sons their formal final blessing – which would say things like Esau should be the most important, because he was the elder brother, and that Isaac believed that God would look after him, and make him powerful and rich. Isaac asked Esau to hunt for a nice wild animal to kill and cook for him, and then he would bless him. Rebecca, Isaac's wife, heard what he asked Esau to do, and decided to cheat both Isaac and Esau. She persuaded Jacob to kill a couple of tender young goats, so she could cook the sort of meal that Isaac liked. Jacob said that he couldn't convince Isaac, even blind, that he was Esau, because Esau and he smelt different, and Esau had hairy arms and long hair, and he, Jacob, did not. However, he did what Rebecca told him to do.

Rebecca cooked the meal, and she also got some of Esau's clothing, for Jacob to wear, so that he would smell like Esau. To deal with the problem of Jacob's lack of body hair, she took the goat skins and put some on his arms, and the back of his neck, where Esau was hairy, and Jacob was not.



If you look at European goats, in the zoo or at a farm, they tend to have a thick coat, and it is difficult to believe that anyone could be fooled into thinking that goatskin was a person's arm, even a hairy arm. But goats, and sheep, in hot countries don't have the thick coat they have here. They have very little coat, as we would think about it. Sheep are not

sheared in Africa, for example, as they are in Northern Europe. We have bred sheep and goats as much for their fleeces as for their meat, but in Jacob's time, several thousand years ago, in a warmer climate, they were more important for their meat than their coats. Compare the goats in these two pictures, and see if you can see what I mean.

When the meal was ready, and Jacob was dressed in his brother's clothes, with the goatskin on his arms and back, he took the meal to Isaac. Isaac was surprised that his meal was ready so fast – Esau usually took longer, because he had to hunt first. Jacob said that he had been fortunate to kill after quite a short hunt. Isaac was a little confused, because he thought he could hear Jacob's



voice, but the person smelt like Esau. He asked Jacob to come closer, so he could feel the skin of his arms. Even then, Isaac asked again, “Are you really Esau?” and Jacob said he was. So Isaac ate the meal, and gave Jacob the blessing he had intended for Esau.

After Jacob had left his father, Esau came home and cooked what he had caught. He took it to his father, and offered it to him. Isaac questioned this new person who he couldn't see, and when he was convinced that this was Esau, he was very upset. Esau asked for a blessing, and Isaac had to tell him that he had already given Jacob the blessing that would make him head of the household, and master of his whole family, including Esau. Esau was very angry – Jacob had stolen his birth right, he said, and now his blessing.

**Talk about:** cheating – making someone believe a lie so that they do something they wouldn't do otherwise. If someone did this to you, how would you feel?

#### 4 **Jacob leaves home: packing for a journey**

**You will need:** a piece of A4 paper, pencil or pen to write with

Imagine you are going on holiday. You don't know how long you are going for, and you are not quite sure how long it will take you to get there. Write a list of the things you need to take – you might want to include food for the beginning of the journey, if you are starting out in the morning.

Esau was very angry with Jacob. He wanted to kill him, but decided that he couldn't, while their father was still alive, but Rebecca heard him planning, and thought that she could save Jacob's life.

She went to Isaac and suggested that Jacob should go and visit her brother, Laban, who lived a long way away, in Haran, and should choose a wife there, from among Laban's daughters, rather than marry one of the local girls, which was what Esau had done. (Rebecca didn't like Esau's choice of girl!) Isaac thought this was an excellent idea, he didn't like Esau's wife either.

Isaac and Rebecca sent Jacob on his way to Haran, and when he had gone, Esau found out what they had done. He had not realised before how much his parents didn't like the Canaanite girls who lived around them, and so he went and found a distant cousin – not from Rebecca's side of the family – and married her.

**Talk about:** planning for a journey, and meeting strangers. Jacob knew where he was going, but he had never met his mother's family before, and he didn't know how long it would take to get there. He was also going on his own, with no-one he knew to introduce him to them. Have you had to meet relatives you didn't know before?

## 5. Jacob's first night away from home: newspaper ladder

**You will need:** 2 or 3 sheets of newspaper, scissors, and someone to help you!



Start rolling the first sheet of newspaper into a tube that is about 1 inch in diameter. As you reach the end of the first piece, place the second piece of newspaper on top of the edge of the first so they overlap. Keep rolling and the second piece will be incorporated in the roll. Keep doing this until you have used all the pieces.

Put the roll down on a table or board. Use the scissors to cut out a section in the middle of the roll so that you have about a quarter of the roll at each end that is the whole roll, and the half in the middle is just half the roll – you should cut through the roll to the hollow in the middle. The roll should look like the first picture. You might need someone to help you do the cutting, if you have a lot of layers of paper.

Bend the roll so that it bends at the two ends of the cut you made. You should now have a thing that looks like two vertical tubes with a flat section connecting them at the top. Now get your assistant to reach into each of the upright tubes, spread their fingers so they press against the inside of the tubes and slowly pull up to make your ladder. How tall will it go?



Jacob left the family camp at Beersheba and set out for Haran. It was a long way, and he knew he would have to spend some nights sleeping on the ground, so when it started to get dark, he found somewhere to spend the night. That first night, he found a place where he could camp. He used a stone as a pillow, and went to sleep.

During the night, he had a dream. He dreamt that he was lying at the bottom of a ladder, which stretched up from the ground beside him and went all the way to heaven. In his dream, there were angels going up and down the ladder, and God was standing at the bottom of the ladder beside him. God spoke to him, promising that he, God, would be with Jacob wherever he went, and would bring him back to this place, and would bless him with descendants to inherit the land.

Jacob woke up, thinking that he had laid down and gone to sleep in a special place, without knowing it – this place, he thought, must be the gate of Heaven. In the morning, he set the stone that he had used as a pillow as a memorial: he stood it on end, and poured some olive oil on it, dedicating it to God, and calling the place Bethel, which is the Hebrew for “House of God”. Jacob made a promise, before he left, that if God was with him on his journey, and looked after him until he came back, then he would worship God for always.

**Talk about:** feeling rescued from something you were not enjoying – like mum or dad coming to help you do something you were struggling with.

## Celebration

It is not very long since Easter. Have you eaten all your Easter eggs? Did you have Hot Cross Buns on Good Friday? We aren't looking at Easter today, because we did that in our last Messy Church, but I thought we could start with a song about Easter. This is:

Celebrate Jesus, Celebrate <https://youtu.be/AcE5fKriAFw>

We often think that all the people who God chose to work with when He made the nation of Israel must be good. It seems odd to think that God might have chosen to work with someone who lied and cheated, but God chose Jacob, not his ever so slightly older brother.

Even before they were born, Esau and Jacob fought. It didn't help that their dad preferred Esau, while their mum preferred Jacob. The Bible says that although Esau was born first, Jacob was born holding on to his brother's heel. They were very different. Esau was hairy and Jacob wasn't; Esau was a hunter and Jacob was a farmer; Jacob cared about the things he would inherit, and Esau didn't.



One day when Esau had been out hunting, and came home very hungry, Jacob was cooking a red bean stew. Esau wanted some, because he was hungry, but instead of just giving his brother some, Jacob decided he could get the birth right, the things that should go to the eldest, from him. “I'll give you some stew,” said Jacob “if you give me the birth

right.” Esau should have said “No!” but he didn’t. “OK,” he said. So he made the bargain there and then.

We can’t make bean stew today, so we’ll make a simple origami box to represent the bowl the stew would have been in. If you want, you could make a papier mâché bowl instead, but that takes longer, because it has to dry. The real bowl would have been made out of clay.

When Isaac was very old, he wanted to give his blessing to his eldest son, to pass on to him what he, Isaac, had received from God. He sent Esau out to hunt and to prepare his favourite meal. Rebecca heard him do it, and while Esau was hunting she got together with Jacob and they planned to trick Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob. Because Esau was hairy, Jacob used goat skin to make him seem hairier. He dressed in Esau’s clothes so he smelled like Esau (they didn’t have good washing powders!) Isaac was blind, but he could hear and feel. He thought the voice was Jacob’s, but the arms were hairy. So he gave Jacob the blessing that Esau should have had. When Esau came back and found out he was furious. Jacob had to run away.

We can’t make goat skin arm coverings, but we will make a wig.

We’ll sing “Uptimes, down times” <https://youtu.be/gZY1ik1OZEM>

Jacob ran away to his mother’s brother’s house. It was a long way away. He went as far away as fast as he could that first day, and at night he was tired. He lay down on the ground with his cloak wrapped around him. He hadn’t brought a pillow with him, so he got a stone and rested his head on that. That may not sound very comfortable, but if you get the right stone then it can be a lot better than not having anything at all.

He was so tired, he soon went to sleep, but he had a funny dream. He dreamed that there, where he was there was a ladder. Not a little ladder like you family might use to paint the top of a wall, or even a big ladder like a builder might use to reach the roof. It was an absolutely enormous ladder. It was so tall it reached right up to heaven. And it was quite wide. It must have been, because there were angels going up and down it! And in his dream God was standing beside him. God said, “I am the Lord. I will give you the land you are lying on and your descendants will be so many that no-one will be able to count them. I will look after you. Wherever you go, you will come back to this place. I will not leave you until I have done everything I have promised you”

When Jacob woke up the next morning he said, “Surely God is in this place, and I didn’t know it!” He took the stone that had been under his head and set it up on end as a marker, and he poured olive-oil on it to dedicate it to God.



We're going to make a ladder out of paper. It won't reach to heaven, but let's see how high it will go.

Jacob was a bit of a scoundrel. He lied and cheated. I don't think I'd have wanted him as a friend. But he really cared about the rights and the blessing, much more than Esau did. While he wasn't a good person, he did the things that God wanted. That's why God looked after him. In two months' time, we'll look at the second part of the story. (Next month we're looking at Pentecost.)

We'll say a prayer.

Dear God, thank you that we don't have to be perfect. You take us as we are and, if we let you, you help us do things for you. We're sorry we don't do the right things always, but you still care for us.

Amen.

We'll sing "Our God is a great big God" <https://youtu.be/8Hi8jW1qYsw>

Next Messy Church is 15<sup>th</sup> May. See you then.

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR\\_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw)  
Then have tea or a treat if it isn't tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don't want shared, just tell me. I'll only share the one's you're happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

We now manage the YouTube channel, and Zoom for talk back to us. Our end of Zoom will be what is going on YouTube, but we won't put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. We live stream at 4pm, but it then stays up as a recording. Like last time we will mix activities into the story.