

Introduction to Advent



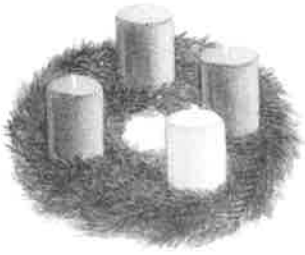
Seasonal Background

The new liturgical year always begins on the First Sunday of Advent. Each year of a three-year cycle, the readings change, and our Gospel readings are taken from a different Gospel so that we might learn more about the life of Jesus. This year, Year B, most of our Gospel readings come from Mark.

Advent is a season of waiting in joyful anticipation. We wait not only for Christmas Day but also for the end of time when Christ will come again. It is a time to prepare our homes and our hearts to welcome Christ. The readings of Advent help us to set our sights on what is to come and the fullness of salvation that is found in Christ. Figures like John the Baptist and the Blessed Virgin Mary model faith and hope in God's loving promise. John the Baptist's preaching continues to prepare us for Christ by changing our hearts and our lives to make ready the way of the Lord. Gospel readings on the Sundays of Advent and Marian feast days provide us with a model for waiting, trusting in God, and a willingness to say yes to God. As the season draws toward its end, the O Antiphons proclaim the titles of Christ that remind us of his continual presence in our world today.

Celebrating the Season

Advent decorations are a visual reminder of our focus during this season. The color violet dominates the environment, with the joyful rose color added on the Third Sunday of Advent. The Advent wreath, large or small, draws our attention. It serves as a center of our prayer. One at a time the candles are lit until the light overcomes the darkness. Familiar Advent hymns return to our weekly worship. Somewhat solemn in tone, they express our longing for Christ's coming this year and at the end of time. Our classrooms and homes too begin to build anticipation. An Advent calendar might focus our attention on Scripture passages and good works as we wait. Contributions to the many organizations that ask for our help during this season can teach us what real giving is intended to do—improve the lives of all, just as Christ's coming is meant to transform the world into the Kingdom of God.



First Sunday of Advent

Be Alert! The Messiah Is Coming

Focus: To turn to God and be saved.

Catechist's Context

Be ready! It sounds like a dire warning, and yet these are the caring words of a loving God who wants us to be prepared for his definite coming. It is up to us to prepare ourselves. How can we be open? How do we receive God's light so we can be light to others?

Focus on Church Teaching

Each one of us has a call from God that we receive at our Baptism. Because we are anointed priest, prophet, and king, we are called to lead lives of holiness and prophetic witness and resolve to bring about the world's sanctification (USCCA, 138). We work for justice and peace because of love; love is what brings about development in each person and in humanity. This love is modeled for us in Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection (CIV, 1).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. What liturgical season begins today? What is the liturgical color for the season? Use the "Introduction to Advent" on page 1 to help guide your discussion, talking about what the season means, how we celebrate it, and how it helps us to prepare our hearts and lives to welcome Christ our Lord.

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Psalm 85:8

Alleluia, alleluia.

Lord, show us your mercy and love,
and grant us your salvation.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 13:33–37

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Watch out and be ready! You don't know when the time will come. It is like what happens when a man goes away for a while and places his servants in charge of everything. He tells each of them what to do, and he orders the watchmen to be on their guard.

"So be on your guard! You don't know when the master of the house will come back. It could be in the evening or at midnight or before dawn or in the morning. But if he comes suddenly, don't let him find you asleep. I tell everyone just what I have told you. Be on your guard!"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Be Ready!

☉ Are you ready?

“Ready for what?” you might ask. Before we talk about what we are getting ready for, let’s talk first about what sorts of things you need to do in order to get ready in general. For example, what do you do when you get up in the morning and your parent tells you, “Get up. Get ready.”

☉ Do you decide on what to wear? what to eat for breakfast?

☉ What are some other things you do or prepare before you leave the house?

There are many things we have to prepare for. We get ready for each of them in very different ways.

☉ Do you get ready for school in the same way you get ready for a play date?

☉ Do you look forward to going to a movie the same way you look forward to going to the doctor or dentist?

Now we are getting ready for Christmas. We do this in two ways. We get ready for Christmas celebrations and we also get ready to welcome Jesus into our hearts. To get ready for each one we do different things.

☉ Does your family decorate your tree or home with some Christmas lights?

Those lights make people feel happy when they see them. They let people know you are celebrating something special. In much the same way, we must prepare to be light to others. How do we do

that? When we prepare our hearts for Jesus we do good things for others. We share. We say kind words to them. We cheer them up when they are sad. We help them if they are sick or lonely or hurt. We get ready for Christmas with lights on the outside. We get our hearts ready for Jesus with Jesus’ light on the inside.

☉ Does your family buy presents?

Everyone loves giving and receiving gifts, especially at Christmastime.

☉ What do you do to make sure everyone has a gift?

You think about what they would like or need. You shop and decide what to buy. You wrap the presents in pretty paper. In much the same way, we must prepare the gifts we have to give Jesus and others. When we prepare our hearts for Jesus we think about the gifts we have to offer. These aren’t things we buy but what we are or do.

☉ What gifts or talents do you have to offer other people?

☉ How do you strengthen those gifts?

☉ Do you always share them with others?

☉ Do you receive what others have to offer you?

We know the date of Christmas but we don’t always know when Jesus will come and ask to be part of our lives. Our hearts must always be ready. Is yours?

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!

You will need a list of Advent hymns sung in your parish to lead this activity.

The children hear so many Christmas songs and probably have been listening to them since the beginning of November! What Advent hymns are sung in your parish? Are there simple ones that you can teach to the children? Or can you sing the refrain of one of the songs? The children certainly know about waiting for Christmas and the joy that surrounds it. Advent is an opportunity for them to sing about waiting for Jesus, the Messiah, and the joy he will bring to the world when he comes.

Stay Awake Song

Teach the children to sing the following song to the tune of "Frère Jacques," also known as "Are You Sleeping?"

*Always watching,
ever faithful,
all for you, all for you.
You won't find us sleeping,
you won't find us sleeping.*

Amen. Amen.

Advent Wreath

You will need safety scissors; paper plates; violet, rose, and yellow construction paper; red and green tissue paper; and glue to lead this activity.

Provide a paper plate for each child. Help the children cut one rose and three violet rectangles from construction paper, about six inches long and one inch wide, to represent candles. Demonstrate folding over about an inch at one end of each candle and gluing this to the paper plates, evenly spacing the candles around the outer circle. Show how to tear and crumple small pieces of green tissue paper and glue them to the outer edges of the plates, especially around the candles to hold them upright. Provide enough red tissue paper to crumple and glue in place to represent berries. Help the children cut small triangles from yellow construction paper to use as flames.

Living the Liturgy at Home

First Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7

Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19 (4)

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Mark 13:33–37

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you are Emmanuel, God with us.
In these holy days of Advent,
come to your people
with justice, healing, and peace.
Fill us with a spirit of love and
generous service,
so that our hearts will be ready to
celebrate your coming at Christmas
and our lives will reflect your Kingdom
that will last forever when you
come again.
You live and reign with
God the Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Conversation Questions

☉ Besides putting up the decorations and lights and shopping for gifts, what can we do to get our hearts ready for the coming of Jesus?

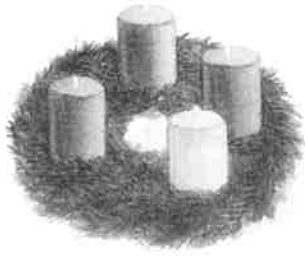
☉ If Jesus came to your home for Christmas, what would you like him to find you doing?

Faith in Action

If Christ were to come back now, what would you like him to find you and your family doing? As we await the coming of Christ Jesus, you might choose to have your family “adopt” another family in need. Inquire at your parish office or at Catholic Charities how your family may provide the gift of warm winter clothing, toiletries, food, or toys and books for children. Include your child in selecting gifts. You might also consider assisting on a food drive or serving food to those in need. Explain to your child that the activity should show you are preparing for the coming of the Lord.

? Did You Know?

. . . that during the season of Advent, Catholic Christians anticipate and celebrate Christ’s coming in three different ways: the Messiah’s Second Coming at the end of time as we know it, Jesus’ coming as an infant in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago, and Christ’s coming once again into our hearts this Christmas as we welcome Emmanuel (“God with us”)?



Second Sunday of Advent

Baptized with the Spirit

Focus: To prepare the way of the Lord.

Catechist's Context

The Gospel of Mark has no infancy narratives so we hear stories of the John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus—even though it is an adult Jesus. Whenever we prepare to receive Jesus Christ into our hearts the message is always the same: we must change our lives, and we must repent.

Focus on Church Teaching

We wait in hope for a time of perfect justice that has not yet arrived (LG, 48). Yet we have the social teaching of the Church to guide us closer to this vision (CSDC, 86). We are called to repent, to turn away from ways of living that are not in right relationship with one another and with God. John the Baptist was the last in a line of prophets calling the people back to live their lives according to God's mandates (RP, 1). His words are for the people of his time and for us today.



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Ask students to find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). How did this saint prepare the way of the Lord as John the Baptist did in today's

Gospel? How might we turn back to God and prepare for the Kingdom of heaven?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 3:4, 6

Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
all people shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:1–8

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

The beginning of the holy Gospel according to Mark.

This is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It began just as God had said in the book written by Isaiah the prophet,

"I am sending my messenger to get the way ready for you.

In the desert someone is shouting,

'Get the road ready for the Lord!

Make a straight path for him.'"

So John the Baptist showed up in the desert and told everyone, "Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven."

From all Judea and from Jerusalem crowds of people went to John. They told how sorry they were for their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

John wore clothes made of camel's hair. He had a leather strap around his waist and ate grasshoppers and wild honey.

John also told the people, "Someone more powerful is going to come. And I am not good enough even to stoop down and untie his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

The Baptist Brings Us Good News!

Listen again to the first words of this Gospel: This is the "Good News" about Jesus Christ.

☉ What makes something "good news"?

The writer of this text wants to tell us that we are going to hear about someone very special. We are going to hear about the amazing things Jesus did and said. He wants us to be excited about his story.

☉ Did you ever want to see a movie because your friend told you it was great?

☉ Did you ever want to buy a toy because a friend of yours had it?

☉ Did you ever want to get an online game because you played it at a friend's house?

Sometimes, another person can point us in the right direction to have fun or do something exciting. That's what John the Baptist did. The things he said made people wonder about the one who would come after him, the person John called "the

Messiah." The Messiah was the one people had waited for for years and years. People were excited to meet this new person.

Now, you might decide to see a movie or buy a toy because the person who recommended these things to you was someone you liked and trusted. John, however, was unusual. He looked very strange. He wore animal skins for clothes, and he ate grasshoppers and wild honey. He didn't care about fancy clothes and food. He put serving God ahead of everything else. John the Baptist was also Jesus' cousin. When the angel came to Jesus' mother Mary to tell her that she was going to have a child, the angel also told her that her cousin Elizabeth would have a child too. After the angel told Mary this good news, Mary went to see Elizabeth right away. When Mary got there, the child in Elizabeth's womb jumped with joy. Right from the beginning, John the Baptist rejoiced over Jesus' coming. He spent his life preparing everyone for the coming of Jesus. He told people they had to change the way they were living and acting. That would be hard for them to do. But he was telling them that if they turn to God they will be forgiven their sins and be saved. Isn't that a good message?

☉ Can you think of some things you might be doing that John might ask you to change? *[not listening to parents or teachers, not sharing with siblings and friends, not taking time to pray and go to church, etc.]*

John told the people, and he is telling us, if we want to be ready for Jesus, if we want our hearts to be ready to welcome Jesus, we have to change.

☉ Is it hard to change?

☉ Whom might you ask to help you to make those good changes so you are ready for Jesus?

John told the people that he baptized them with water but Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. When you were baptized, you were baptized with water and you received the Holy Spirit! You were chosen by God to do his work. That is good news, isn't it? It was God's promise to help you do the hard things you need to do. We can thank God for this help by trying our best each day to do what God wants us to do.

John the Baptist

You will need line art of John the Baptist copied onto tan construction paper and coloring materials for this activity. You may also want to have sand and glue.

Distribute the coloring sheets of John the Baptist for children to color. You might allow children to add texture to their drawings by spreading glue in a few places and sprinkling them with sand. Have the children take their coloring sheets home to remind them of John's message of Good News and to help them prepare themselves for the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

Baptized in the Holy Spirit

You will need to arrange for the children to visit the baptismal font in your church when it is empty or in between Masses to lead this activity.

Bring the children to visit the baptismal font in your parish church. Ask if anyone has ever seen a Baptism. Explain that we baptize people in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is different from the baptism that John preached. This Baptism washes away sins and makes us members of the Church and the children of God. Help the children bless themselves with holy water, and explain that each time we do this, we remember that we are part of the Church community and God's own children.

Good News Megaphones

You will need white card stock or construction paper, clear tape, and crayons or markers to lead this activity.

Invite children to decorate their papers to remind them of John the Baptist and what he teaches us about Jesus. Some images they could draw include water, doves (to represent the Holy Spirit), and candles. When the children are finished, help them roll their sheets of paper into megaphone shapes and tape them together. Tell the children that John the Baptist and the other prophets proclaimed the Good News that Jesus was coming. We also are called to proclaim the Good News about Jesus. The children's megaphones can help to make their voices loud as they proclaim messages about Jesus. Invite them to repeat a few messages after you, such as "Prepare the way!" "Open your hearts!" "The Light of the World is coming!"

Living the Liturgy at Home

Second Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11

Psalms 85:9–10, 11–12, 13–14 (8)

2 Peter 3:8–14

Mark 1:1–8

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you are Emmanuel, God with us.
In these holy days of Advent,
come to your people
with justice, healing, and peace.
Fill us with a spirit of love and
generous service,
so that our hearts will be ready to
celebrate your coming at Christmas
and our lives will reflect your Kingdom
that will last forever when you
come again.
You live and reign with God the Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Conversation Questions

☉ John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by telling everyone they needed to change their lives to become better people. What one thing can each member of your family change to get ready for Jesus?

☉ In what ways are we “light” to the people around us?

Faith in Action

Your family might try living simply for one day this week. John the Baptist lived in the desert because his focus and attention was on his mission. How might your family live one day without the computer, the television, or cell phones? Use the time to focus on reading Scripture or praying or service.

Did You Know?

... John the Baptist was actually Jesus' cousin? He was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth, who was thought to have been too old to have a child. Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth when both women were pregnant, and John leapt in Elizabeth's womb, the first to testify to Jesus. As a grown man, John also testified to the coming of the Christ.



Third Sunday of Advent

The Almighty Has Done Great Things

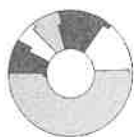
Focus: To testify to the light.

Catechist's Context

We are not the Messiah. We are not even John. How would you answer the command, "Tell us who you are"? As we wait for Jesus to come again, we all have a part to play in God's plan. As teachers, your task is great. How would you define it? How will you help your students discover theirs?

Focus on Church Teaching

The Third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday, is when the rose candle is lit on the Advent Wreath (*Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers*, p. 73). In the *Magnificat*, Mary shares an important truth: God's preference for the least among us. This love and preference will be seen most fully in the life and ministry of Jesus. Mary's words call all disciples to recognize that this preference is an inseparable part of God's call to each one of us (CSDC, 59).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Ask students to find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). How was this saint's life a testimony to God's goodness?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Isaiah 61:1

Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord now upon me
has sent me bring good news to the poor.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 1:19–28

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

The Jewish leaders sent priests and temple helpers to ask John who he was. He told them plainly, "I am not the Messiah." Then when they asked him if he were Elijah, he said, "No, I am not!" And when they asked if he were the Prophet, he also said "No!"

Finally, they said, "Who are you then? We have to give an answer to the ones who sent us. Tell us who you are!"

John answered in the words of the prophet Isaiah,

**"I am only someone shouting in the desert,
'Get the road ready for the Lord!'"**

Some Pharisees had also been sent to John. They asked him, "Why are you baptizing people, if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?"

John told them, "I use water to baptize people. But here with you is someone you don't know. Even though I came first, I am not good enough to untie his sandals."

John said this as he was baptizing east of the Jordan River in Bethany.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Getting Ready for Jesus

☉ Did you ever want to meet someone famous? Who?

The people who were waiting for the Messiah really wanted to meet him. But they didn't know who he was. They asked John if he was the Messiah, the one they were waiting for.

☉ Why do you think they asked John? What was he doing that made the people think he might be the one they were waiting for? *[teaching, bringing messages of change, baptizing people, telling people to make God their focus]*

Even though he seemed like the Messiah, John told the people no, he wasn't the Messiah. John knew he was not the one they were waiting for because he already knew his own job and his role—to get people ready for the coming of the actual Messiah, Jesus!

We hear that phrase a lot in Advent: get ready! Many people help us get ready for things, just like John helped the people get ready for Jesus.

☉ Do you play a sport? Who helps you get ready? *[coaches teach us, parents might practice with us]*

☉ Do you dance or play an instrument? Who helps you get ready? *[instructors give us lessons, parents might help us practice]*

☉ What other examples can you think of that we need to be ready for?

☉ Who helps us prepare for them?

Like John, the people who help us get ready have an important job. They teach us, they encourage us, they correct us when we are wrong, and they praise us when we do well. But even though these people help us, their work will not be successful unless *we* listen to them and respond. If our coaches teach us to play a game but we don't listen or we don't practice, we will not be good players. If our piano teacher or violin teacher works hard on our lessons but we don't pay attention or practice we will not learn how to play the instrument. Who is the most important person when it comes to getting ready? We are! So, the people who went to see and hear John did not change just because of what John said. They changed because they were willing to work hard at making changes in themselves after they listened to John.

We are getting ready for Jesus. We want to welcome him at Christmas and into our hearts forever. We need to listen to what God has to say, but we need to practice what we hear. We are the ones who have to get ready for Jesus!

☉ God had a special plan for the life of John the Baptist. What did God want John the Baptist to do?

John the Baptist was born around the same time as Jesus, and he devoted his life to telling everyone that the Savior was coming. He helped the people to prepare their hearts and lives for Jesus by baptizing them in the Jordan River as a way of helping them decide to stop sinning. He always talked about God's Son, who would baptize them with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Advent is our time of clearing sins and negative feelings like jealousy or anger from our lives so that we can make room for Jesus.

☉ What can children your age do to make room for Jesus in your hearts and lives?

O Antiphons

You will need large, colorful images of a key, sun, and crown to lead this activity.

The O Antiphons comprise some of the most beautiful names for the Messiah. The entire concept might be difficult for the children to grasp, but the symbols can evoke some interesting insights into who Jesus is. A key (O Key of David), sun (O Radiant Dawn), and a crown (O King of Nations) are three excellent examples. Explain to the children that when the people were waiting for the Messiah they gave him these titles. Names tell us something about the person. Ask the children to discuss what each name teaches us about Jesus as you hold up each image:

Key: What do keys do? Why are they important? How is Jesus like a key?

Sun: What does the sun do? Why is it important? How is Jesus like the sun?

Crown: What does a crown represent? What kind of king is Jesus?

Just Like John

You will need rhythm instruments to lead this activity.

Invite the children to prepare the way for Jesus, just like John the Baptist. Teach them the following chant. Process through the room or through the whole building, if permitted, calling on all who hear to prepare the way!

*Prepare the way! Prepare the way!
Jesus is the light.
Prepare the way! Prepare the way,
By doing what is right.*

Sing for Joy!

You will need an outline of a candle with the word *JOY* written underneath to lead this activity. You will also need enough pink crayons, markers, or pencils for each child and to teach them an Advent hymn.

If you have an Advent wreath in your space, point out that lighting the pink candle is a sign of joy. The Third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday. *Gaudete* means "rejoice." In the few days remaining before Christmas you might want to choose one or two Christmas hymns to sing with the children. They have been hearing many Christmas songs, but they might not be familiar with our traditional church hymns. This is a good time to practice them. The children may color their candles pink while they sing their songs.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Third Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 61:1–2a, 10–11

Luke 1:46–48, 49–50, 53–54
(Isaiah 61:10b)

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

John 1:6–8, 19–28

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you are Emmanuel, God with us.
In these holy days of Advent,
come to your people
with justice, healing, and peace.
Fill us with a spirit of love and
generous service,
so that our hearts will be ready to
celebrate your coming at Christmas
and our lives will reflect your Kingdom
that will last forever when you
come again.
You live and reign with
God the Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Conversation Questions

☺ John was not the Messiah people were waiting for. But he had an important job to do in preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ. As we wait for Jesus to come again, how well have we been preparing our hearts and lives for Jesus' coming?

☺ What reasons do we have to rejoice this Sunday? this week?

Faith in Action

Today's Gospel reading invites us to reflect on our Baptism. Show your child photos or video of his or her Baptism. Talk about how significant a moment that was in his or her life. If you are able, show the symbols representing new life: the white garment, holy water, baptismal candle. Affirm all the ways your child has been living as a baptized Christian.

Did You Know?

... that the song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is based on the O Antiphons, which are prayed starting on December 17? Each antiphon, prayed before the *Magnificat* during evening prayer, uses an ancient biblical image for the Messiah, connecting us to the great tradition of those who await the coming of the Savior. O come, Emmanuel!



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Mary, the Dwelling Place of God

Focus: To prepare a home for Christ at Christmas.

Catechist's Context

Mary said yes, a simple but courageous assent to set an example for all people, for all generations. Our answer must also be yes to whatever God calls us to do. How can we do this?

Note that the Gospel passage for this day is the same for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Focus on Church Teaching

Mary's yes changed the world. Because she said yes, she became a mother, both Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church (CCC, 963–75). Jesus is the Gospel, the Good News, the reason human beings can and must hope, the source of the joy the Church proclaims to all people (CL, 7). Because God loved us first, we are capable of loving in response. We experience God's love and presence in the liturgy and learn to find it in our daily lives (DCE, 17).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Ask students to find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). In what ways did this saint trust in God as Mary did?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the servant of the Lord:
let it be done to me according to your word.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 1:26–38

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you."

Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end."

Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not married!"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God.

"Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. Nothing is impossible for God!"

Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said."

And the angel left her.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

"I Am the Lord's Servant!"

When the angel came to tell Mary God wanted her to be the mother of Jesus, she gave an unusual answer. It meant yes, but her words were: "I am the Lord's servant!"

☺ Do you know who a servant is? *[someone who works for or serves another, who does what they are asked or instructed to do]*

☺ What are some jobs servants do? *[cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for children or animals, caring for the grounds of an estate]*

Some servants are treated only like workers but other servants are thought of like members of the family. Some servants might think about their duties as a job. Other servants might see what they do as helping their employers and showing their love and loyalty to the family. They become very close and they take care of each other like extended family members. When Mary responded

that she is God's servant, it meant that she knew what God had called her to do.

She was called because God loved her very much. God knew that he could trust Mary to do her best, to be brave, and to take care of Jesus. Mary could feel God's love and wanted to respond to what God asked her to do. She knew there would be challenging times, but she also knew there would be very happy times in taking care of Jesus. She knew there might be difficult things to do but she also knew that God would not ask her to do anything she couldn't do. She knew above all that God would be with her through all of these times. He would never leave her alone. And so, Mary said yes. She promised to be a good servant to a loving God.

When we are baptized, God calls us to be his beloved children and to serve him faithfully, just like Mary did. It is our job to bring Jesus to everyone we meet, just like Mary did. We do it in different ways. When we share our things with people who are in need, we are showing them the face of Jesus. When we pray together, we are showing people how Jesus prayed.

☺ Can you think of other ways we bring Jesus to the world?

Faithful servants show love and care for those they serve. Let's not think of our service as simply a job to do. We are God's faithful servants. God relies on us to continue the work of Jesus. Mary is our best example of being a good servant of the Lord. Let us try to follow her example and pray that she be with us in everything we do.

Hope Cards

You will need blank postcards and coloring materials to lead this activity. You may want to print or write the postcards with the words: "Nothing is impossible for God."

Distribute postcards with the words, "Nothing is impossible for God," and invite the children to decorate the postcards to announce the wonderful birth of Jesus. Encourage the children to take their postcards home to send to friends or relatives. Or collect the children's postcards to send to a hospital or another place where people might be in special need of hope at this time of year.

Saying Yes to God Game

Have the children form a circle seated on the floor. Explain that you will go around the circle and each person will say one way that we can say yes to God's love, like Mary. Remind the children that God said yes too by keeping his promise to his people. On the second round, ask children to name one way each is preparing for the coming of Christ.

Angels in Our Lives

You will need white card stock on which a figure of an angel is outlined (make enough copies for each child), markers or crayons, scissors, a hole punch, and lengths of yarn or ribbon.

Remind the children that God sent the angel Gabriel to deliver his message to Mary. Sometimes we say that a person is like an angel because he or she teaches us about God through his kind words or actions. Ask the children to think about who are the "angels" in their lives who teach them about God. They could be parents, family members, teachers, priests, or religious. Have the children color and decorate their card angels and help them to cut them out. Punch a hole at the top and loop a length of string or yarn through it. Instruct them to give these as ornamental gifts to the human "angels" in their lives.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Fourth Sunday of Advent



Scripture Readings

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16

Psalms 89:2–3, 4–5, 27, 29 (2a)

Romans 16:25–27

Luke 1:26–38

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you are Emmanuel, God with us.
In these holy days of Advent,
come to your people
with justice, healing, and peace.
Fill us with a spirit of love and
generous service,
so that our hearts will be ready to
celebrate your coming at Christmas
and our lives will reflect your Kingdom
that will last forever when you
come again.
You live and reign with God
the Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Conversation Questions

☺ Not all of us are visited by a messenger of the Lord with a request from God. Yet we do receive invitations from God all the time. How might we be on the alert for these calls?

☺ How can we say yes to God beyond the Advent season?

Faith in Action

Prepare to attend Mass together as a family for Christmas. Jesus came as one of us to show us how to live. This is a great gift to celebrate! While you are at church visit the crèche. Pause for a moment to thank God for the great gift of Jesus and to listen quietly to God's Word in your heart.

Did You Know?

... that Gabriel is one of the three archangels mentioned in the Bible? Michael is mentioned in Daniel, Jude, and Revelation. Raphael is mentioned in the Book of Tobit. Gabriel is best known for the Annunciation but appears in other places as well, including to John the Baptist's father, Zechariah.

Introduction to Christmas Time



Seasonal Background

By the third century, Christians wanted a feast to celebrate the birth of the Savior. The choice of a time in midwinter, the darkest time of the year in North America, points to the belief that Christ brings light into the darkness of our world. The birth of Jesus is good news. His coming proclaims that light triumphs over darkness.

The mystery of the Incarnation, God becoming fully human, encompasses a whole season, revealing that Christmas is more than a celebration of Jesus' birth. Christmas Time, like the whole of the liturgical year, gives us a chance to meditate more deeply on important events in the life of Jesus. We are able to think about Jesus' early life and the miraculous signs that accompanied his birth. We celebrate that he, like us, was born into and was part of a family and that our families too are holy. We think about his mother Mary and her special role in salvation history. We reflect on Christ's baptism in the Jordan River and what it might mean for us to be adopted into the same special relationship with the Father. Each of these moments inspires deeper reflection on the Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. What these Scripture passages have in common is their emphasis on how God came into our midst. The full mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus as true God and true man, fully human and fully divine, is the essential message of Christmas.

Celebrating the Season

During Christmas Time, the liturgy reflects joy and the glory of God. The singing of the *Gloria*, the aroma of incense, the sounds of the choir, and the images of the Nativity draw us deeper in awe of the mystery this season celebrates: that God has taken on human flesh and become one of us.

In keeping with the season, the Christmas Time environment should be rich and vibrant. The liturgical color for this season is white. You may wish to decorate your space in white, gold, and silver and with poinsettias, Christmas cactus, and evergreens. Crafts on Nativity scenes, stars, shepherds and sheep, and images of the Holy Family are all beautiful ways to celebrate Christmas Time. Keep the celebration going with music too! Christmas carols are fun and joyful and remind us that our celebration is too joyful to be limited to just one day.

Encourage parents not to end their Christmas celebration on December 26. Remind them to continue displaying their decorations, especially the Nativity scene. Send children home with chalk and a traditional house blessing prayer to celebrate Epiphany.



Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

December 25

The Light Shines

Focus: To behold that our Savior is born!

Catechist's Context

What a glorious day! God has given us all a sign of hope and a promise of new life. God has given us his own Son to be one of us, to show us how to live, to teach us. His arrival changed the world forever. Our Gospel today tells us this amazing story of the Christ child born in the most humble of circumstances. Merry Christmas!

Focus on Church Teaching

The celebration of the Nativity of the Lord became part of the Church very early in its history (UNLY, 32). At Christmas, we reflect on the great mystery of the Incarnation. The Word of God becomes human so that we might share in his divinity (DD, 77). Jesus told us that whatever we do for the least, we do for him, and so we know that the Incarnation is not something in the past, for Jesus is present in our world in a particular way in those who most need our love and protection (EG, 179).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Ask students to find today's date on the liturgical calendar. For Catholics, our celebration of Christmas lasts more than just one day. Together, count the number of days in Christmas Time this year (the gold or white days on the calendar during this season). Why does the Christmas Time last more than one day? What do we cel-

brate during this time? Use the "Introduction to Christmas Time" on page 19 to help you lead this discussion.

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 2:10–11

Alleluia, alleluia.

Good news and great joy to all the world:
today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:1–14

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. These first records were made when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family.

Mary was engaged to Joseph and traveled with him to Bethlehem. She was soon going to have a baby, and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying in a manger."

Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: "Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

The First Christmas

Today's Gospel text is the story of Jesus' birth. He was born in a little town called Bethlehem. Jesus was born there because it was where Joseph's family was from. If your parents traveled to the place where their family came from, where would you be born? It might be a different state or a different country!

Jesus came from a very important family, that of King David. Sometimes we hear Jesus called Son of David. So many people were traveling to the homes of their ancestors because the ruler wanted to take a census—that is, he wanted to count all the people who lived in his kingdom. They needed to be counted as part of their original hometowns. So, you can imagine that Bethlehem was crowded with extra people who have come from other places. When Mary and Joseph arrived, they had no place to stay. The only place they could stay was in a stable with the animals. When Jesus was born they put him in a manger for his bed. A manger is a feeding trough for animals so it was filled with soft hay that would keep Jesus comfortable and warm. Soon after Jesus was born angels appeared in the sky and announced the Good News to shepherds who were in the fields watching their sheep. The angels told them about the baby and they told them something amazing! This was not just an ordinary baby—this baby was the Son of God! He was the Messiah, the savior, who everyone was waiting for for a long, long time! He would teach them how to live as God wanted them to live. That is the story of the first Christmas! Today we remember and tell that story.

☺ Why do we tell that story every year?

So that we can remember that Jesus was born just like you and I were born. But we also tell that story to remind us that that little baby grew up and lived his whole life doing everything that God wanted him to do. And, because he was born like one of us, he taught us that we can do the same thing. Every day we can choose to do what God teaches us. And, if we do that every day, we will make the world a better and better place until Jesus comes again.

Joy to the World!

You will need a collection of Christmas carols to lead this activity.

Excellent additions to the secular Christmas songs the children have been hearing up to Christmas Day are Christmas carols. Play recordings and encourage the children to sing along.

The First Christmas

You will need a video that tells the story of the first Christmas to lead this activity.

Preview the video by first showing the children the beginning chapters of Luke and explaining that this is the first story that was ever written about how Jesus was born. It is two thousand years old. Then play the video for the children. Follow up by allowing them to ask questions about what they have seen and connecting your discussion to the Scripture passages.

Tell the Story

You will need a small box or basket, and old Christmas cards with scenes of the Nativity to lead this activity. Cut out the figures (including animals).

Have the children tell you the Christmas story. Place all the cutout figures in a small basket or box. Have one child take a figure and identify who or what it is and the role that person or animal played in the story of the Nativity. For example: if a shepherd is chosen, he or she might say, "This is a shepherd. He heard the message of the angels announcing that Jesus was born and where to find him." Give feedback as needed. Allow other children to choose figures. If time permits at the end, the children may arrange all the figures in a manger scene.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

December 25



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 9:1–6

Psalms 96:1–2–3, 11–12, 13
(Luke 2:11)

Titus 2:11–14

Luke 2:1–14

Prayer

Lord our God,
in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
you have become one of us.
During this Christmas season,
help us to enter more deeply
into the mystery of the Incarnation.
Help us to recognize your presence
in the Holy Child in the manger,
in the sacraments of the Church,
and in the people around us:
in family, friends, and strangers,
knowing that Christ was born for all
and that we are all children of God.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Did You Know?

... that Christmas lasts for more than just one day? Today begins the liturgical season of Christmas Time, which ends with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The Lord's baptism is generally the Sunday following Epiphany, but on occasion it occurs on the Monday directly following Epiphany.

Conversation Questions

☉ What is your favorite part of the Christmas story? If you were with the shepherds when they heard the news, how would you feel?

☉ Jesus is God's greatest gift to us. What is the best gift you've given this year? Why? What is the best one you've received? Why?

Faith in Action

Help your child send thankyou notes to those who gave gifts to him or her. If your child is too young to write, he or she can draw in the blank space inside the card a picture of himself or herself with the item given or dictate a message for you to write. Use this opportunity to talk about the gifts that God has given us, especially the gift of Jesus. We thank God for our blessings through prayer and in the way we use our gifts.



Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Seeing Our Salvation in Jesus

Focus: To know that the people's redemption is realized in the child Jesus.

Catechist's Context

We celebrate family life on this feast of the Holy Family. Invite children to share their thoughts on their own families.

**Please note that the Gospel passage used in this session is taken from the Lectionary for Masses with Children. It is different from the Gospel found in the standard Lectionary for Mass, which is normally used at regular parish Masses.*

Focus on Church Teaching

Jesus is the light for all the world. The Church proclaims the Gospel so that this light can spread to every land and people (LG, 1). Through the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, all families are made holy. The family itself is a school of holiness. Parents have a duty to educate their children in the faith and to guide them on the path to salvation by word and example (GS, 48).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). We are part of God's family because we have been baptized. How did the saint

you read about help God's family? How do you help other members of God's family?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Colossians 3:15a, 16

Alleluia, alleluia.

May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
and the fullness of his message live within you.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

**A reading from the holy Gospel according
to Matthew.**

An angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. The angel said, "Get up! Hurry and take the child and his mother to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is looking for the child and wants to kill him."

That night Joseph got up and took his wife and the child to Egypt, where they stayed until Herod

died. So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "I called my son out of Egypt."

After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph while he was still in Egypt. The angel said, "Get up and take the child and his mother back to Israel. The people who wanted to kill him are now dead."

Joseph got up and left with them for Israel. But when he heard that Herod's son Archelaus was now ruler of Judea, he was afraid to go there. Then in a dream he was told to go to Galilee, and they went to live there in the town of Nazareth.

So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "He will be called a Nazarene."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

All Families Are Holy

When people heard that Jesus was born they were very happy! But not everyone. The kings and rulers of the land were worried that Jesus would become a new king, a new ruler. They didn't know that Jesus didn't come to be rich and powerful. Jesus came to teach us about God and show us how to live as God wants. King Herod felt threatened by Jesus and wanted to kill him. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus went to Egypt until it was safe

to return to their own country. They went back to where Mary and Joseph lived, to Nazareth. When Jesus grew older people used to call him "Jesus of Nazareth."

We don't hear much about Jesus' family life and stories of his childhood. We do know that Jesus had a family just like you do. He was loved and cared for and his parents on earth knew they were given a huge responsibility. In the same way, your families have a great responsibility to love and care for you too.

☺ What makes your family special?

This is the feast of the Holy Family. Today we honor not just the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph but all holy families around the world. Holy families live in every country in the world. Holy families come in all different shapes and sizes: big and small, old and young. Your family is one of these holy families!

☺ What makes a family holy?

They believe in God and pray together. They love one another and care for one another. They are good and kind to people outside their family. They try to help those who are in need. They live each day as God wants them to live.

My Holy Family

You will need drawing paper and coloring materials to lead this activity.

Invite the children to draw a picture of their family. They may include extended members as well as the immediate family members. Help the children write their names and label their drawings "My Holy Family." If time permits, ask children to give reasons why their families are holy.

Our Local Family of God

The parish you belong to is part of God's holy family. Parishes are often named after saints who lived as holy children of God. What is the name of your parish? What are the names of some other parishes that you know of? What do you know about the saints these parishes are named after? Talk about some of the other things that we do with the people in our parish that we also do with our families, like praying and singing together, asking forgiveness and forgiving one another, sharing a meal together, greeting each other, and helping each other.

New Year Resolutions

You will need special notepaper or index cards to lead this activity.

Although we are well into the new liturgical year, we will be entering a new calendar year on January 1. Explain to the children that typically we make resolutions on New Year's Eve (or Day). We make a promise to do something for the upcoming year, such as lose weight or practice healthier habits, earn a degree, be better at something, etc.

Invite the children to consider one thing they will do during the coming year to be a better classmate. Help them write the resolution on the paper provided or draw a picture of what they will do. They may decorate the drawing and then display it on their desk or cubby or bin—somewhere they can see it every day so it will remind them to practice their promise.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph



Scripture Readings

Genesis 15:1–6; 21:1–3 or
Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

Psalms 105:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 8–9
(7a, 8a) or 128:1–2, 3, 4–5
(see 1)

Hebrews 11:8, 11–12, 17–19 or
Colossians 3:12–21 or 3:12–17

Luke 2:22–40 or 2:22, 39–40

Prayer

Lord our God,
in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
you have become one of us.
During this Christmas season,
help us to enter more deeply
into the mystery of the Incarnation.
Help us to recognize your presence
in the Holy Child in the manger,
in the sacraments of the Church,
and in the people around us:
in family, friends, and strangers,
knowing that Christ was born for all
and that we are all children of God.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Did You Know?

... that the Congregation of the Holy Cross is a religious community in the Church that is made up of sisters, brothers, and priests? The members of the Holy Family are the patrons for this religious community. The sisters are dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the brothers to St. Joseph, and the Holy Cross priests to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ What are the essential qualities of a holy family? How has our family helped each other to become more Christ like?
- ☉ What blessings within our family are you most grateful for?
- ☉ Focus on the figure of the baby Jesus in the Nativity scene. What does this child's arrival mean for our salvation and redemption from sin and death?

Faith in Action

Our experience of worship is the same, regardless of parish, since we are all one Catholic Church. Try to obtain copies of different bulletins from friends or family members who are members of different parishes. You may also look up bulletins online. Compare the bulletins for similarities and differences. Are there events or projects in the other parishes that you might like to suggest including at your parish?

**Please note that your child's session will have focused on Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23, the reading found in the Lectionary for Masses with Children. This is different from what is used during Mass, which is taken from one of the options in the standard Lectionary for Mass.*



Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1

God's Many Blessings

Focus: To profess Mary as the Mother of God.

Catechist's Context

Mary had a special role in bringing salvation to people everywhere. Through the Mother of Jesus, we proclaim with joy God's gift for each one of us. On this day, we honor Mary, the Mother of God, who said yes to all that God asked.

Focus on Church Teaching

In Mary's *fiat*, her yes, we see a perfect example of the proper human response to God's call (VD, 27). Because Jesus was born of Mary, a human woman, our sister, Jesus is truly human as well as truly divine (Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Epictetus*, Office of Readings for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1). The Church proclaimed Mary as Mother of God at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431 (CCC, 466).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Today we celebrate Mary's role as the mother of God. When the shepherds learned about Jesus, they were excited to see him. Mary shared in this excitement over the gift that God had given her and the whole world in the infant Jesus. What do these reactions teach us about rejoicing in our relationship with Jesus? Are we excited to spend time with Jesus?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Hebrews 1:1–2

Alleluia, alleluia.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through
the prophets;
now God speaks to us through the Son.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:16–21

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

The shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying in the manger.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

Eight days later Jesus' parents did for him what the Law of Moses commands. And they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told Mary when he promised she would have a baby.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Jesus: God's Gift for the World

☺ Why did the shepherds hurry to see Jesus after the angels left them?

The shepherds were probably really excited, weren't they? They wanted to go see the newborn King. They were probably so excited that they could hardly hold it in! They wanted to tell everyone they knew what had happened. Word spread all throughout the place where the shepherds lived that Jesus had been born, and it all started with the shepherds, who had been told the Good News by an angel.

In the Gospel, we hear that Mary kept all of these things in her heart and thought about them. I wonder what that means. When memories are very special to us, we keep them in our hearts, don't we? We take time to be quiet and remember these things. We take time to thank God for these special memories. Mary spent time thinking about all of the things that happened when Jesus was young because she knew that she was part of something very important, and she needed time to think about it. She wanted to bring all of this to God in prayer.

☺ What do you keep in your hearts? Do you bring them to God in prayer?

Today is the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. Mary was the mother of Jesus. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God in three divine Persons. We call this the Holy Trinity. Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. Since Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, we say that Mary is the mother of God since she gave birth to Jesus Christ when he came to earth to be one of us. She helped God give us the wonderful gift and blessing of Jesus.

Tell the World!

You will need a simple outline of a shepherd's crook copied onto tan paper. Make enough copies for each child. You will also need scissors and coloring materials. Optional items include glitter, glue, and candy canes.

Remind the children about the shepherds, who were visited by the angels and who told everyone about Jesus. Tell the children that shepherds use their crooks to guide their sheep. Help them to cut out their shepherd's crooks and decorate them with markers and perhaps glitter and glue. Help them with any words they might want to write on their shepherd's crooks.

To conclude this exercise, you may want to give each child two candy canes. One candy cane is for the child himself or herself, and the other is for him or her to give to someone with whom he or she will share the Good News about Jesus, just as the shepherds did.

The Heart of Mary

You will need white construction paper, safety scissors, and coloring materials to lead this activity.

Distribute white construction paper to the children, reminding them that white is the liturgical color for Christmas and that we're still in Christmas Time. Help the children fold their paper in half and cut half of a heart so that when the paper is unfolded, they will have a whole heart.

The Gospel tells us that Mary kept all the wonderful memories of the birth of Jesus in her heart. Explain that this means she treasured her memories. Invite the children to draw, inside their paper hearts, pictures of some of the memories that Mary treasured.

Shepherds and Sheep

You need a picture book about shepherds or photos of shepherds and sheep to lead this reflection.

Find a picture book that focuses on the shepherds in the Christmas story, or bring pictures of shepherds and sheep from other sources. Explain that shepherds were poor people. They worked outdoors, year-round, regardless of the weather. They lived ruggedly, and most people had very little respect for them. Yet, God chose to send his special messengers, angels, to these poor people rather than to kings or rich families. God has a special love for those who depend on him rather than on power and money.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1



Scripture Readings

Numbers 6:22–27

Psalms 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8 (2a)

Galatians 4:4–7

Luke 2:16–21

Prayer

Lord our God,
in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
you have become one of us.
During this Christmas season,
help us to enter more deeply
into the mystery of the Incarnation.
Help us to recognize your presence
in the Holy Child in the manger,
in the sacraments of the Church,
and in the people around us:
in family, friends, and strangers,
knowing that Christ was born for all
and that we are all children of God.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ How do you think the shepherds felt when they saw Jesus?
- ☉ How do you think Mary felt when these strangers came to worship her newborn son?

Faith in Action

Christmas Time is an opportunity to talk to family members about their own births. Find some photos and information about your child's birth, as well as photos or videos of their significant milestones, such as eating at the table or taking first steps. Help your child understand how precious he or she is to the family. As your child grows, he or she will continue to reflect God's presence in the world.

?? Did You Know?

... that the Third Ecumenical Council that proclaimed Mary as mother of God was held in the Turkish city of Ephesus in 431? According to tradition, Mary went to live near Ephesus with the Apostle John after Pentecost. Since the late nineteenth century, Mary House in Ephesus has been a pilgrimage site.



Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

A Shepherd for All People

Focus: To revel in the light of God's salvation.

Catechist's Context

Jesus came to save us all. Wise men from afar found their way to Jesus by a guiding star. How are we signs for others? How do you shepherd your students to find Jesus? How do your students lead you to discover things about Jesus that you have never known?

Focus on Church Teaching

In the star that guided the Magi to Bethlehem, the light of Christ is revealed to all nations. All Christians are called to be like Christ's light, reflect his love to others (BB, 1612A), and serve as a beacon to those who do not yet know him (RCIA, 9). Through this light, we are able to see what will someday be fulfilled—the Kingdom of God (LG, 8).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). The Wise Men had a star to follow to find and worship the infant king. What helped this saint find Christ? What points us to Christ in our daily lives?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 2:2

Alleluia, alleluia.

We have seen his star in the east
and have come to adore the Lord.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 2:1–12

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

**A reading from the holy Gospel according
to Matthew.**

When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. Herod brought together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

They told him, "He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote, 'Bethlehem in the land of

Judea, / you are very important among the towns of Judea. / From your town will come a leader, / who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel."

Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. He told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too."

The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they kneeled down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him. Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went back home by another road.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Jesus' Special Visitors

Today, we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord. When God reveals something to us, or shows us something new, we call it an epiphany. On this solemnity, we celebrate that God revealed the Good News about Jesus to the Magi. They didn't figure it out by themselves. It's a gift of knowledge that God gives about himself.

☉ Do you ever have visitors to your house who come from very far away?

☉ Is everyone in your family excited when they come to visit?

When Jesus was born, he had some very special visitors. They came from very far away, on camelback.

☉ How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when they saw these visitors?

These special visitors were called Magi, they were Wise Men who studied the stars. One day they saw a new star in the sky and they thought it meant that a new king was born. They followed the star to Jerusalem to ask for help in finding this special person. They learned that the Messiah (you might need to explain this title) was to be born in Bethlehem. And that's where Jesus was born! Herod, the king in Jerusalem, told the Wise Men to go and find the new king and then come back and let him know so that he could see the baby too. But in reality, his purpose was to harm Jesus. He felt threatened. He didn't want a new king taking over his kingdom. Little did he know that he didn't have to worry about Jesus taking over his kingdom—Jesus was responsible for God's kingdom on earth.

The Magi found Jesus with Mary and Joseph, and they brought gifts. They didn't bring baby gifts though. They brought beautiful, expensive gifts that signified how very special Jesus was. Because Jesus was a king, they brought him some gold. Because they knew that Jesus was going to be someone very special they brought him frankincense. It is a kind of incense.

☉ Did you ever smell incense in your church?

☉ Have you watched the smoke from incense rise up to the ceiling?

The smoke from the incense rises and carries our prayers up to God. Jesus would teach us how to pray to God so the incense would be a sign of that.

The Magi also brought myrrh. It is a fragrant healing lotion that people can use when they are hurt.

☉ Why do you think they gave Jesus myrrh?

☉ When do you think Jesus would need or use this oil? *[maybe when he was hurt]*

All of these gifts were things one would present to a special person, like a king.

☉ Do you think Mary and Joseph appreciated them?

☉ If you were with the Wise Men when they visited Jesus, what gift would you bring? Why?

We don't really know the names of the Wise Men but over the years people have given them very unusual names. They came from a part of the world where these names might have been common. They are not names that we usually hear, but let's try to remember them: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.

Who Is Your Star?

You will need one pair of scissors and tape or glue, coloring materials, and enough paper stars and straws or sticks for each child to lead this activity. As an option, bring lengths of tinsel or colorful streamers and teach children the song, "We Three Kings."

A star led the Wise Men to Jesus. Many people in our lives show us the way to Jesus. Have children decorate their stars and attach them to a straw or craft stick. (They might also tape strips of tinsel or streamers to the bottom ends of their stars.) As the children hold up their stars, ask them who leads them to Jesus.

You might end the activity with a short procession in the hall or around your classroom and have the children sing "We Three Kings."

Three Kings

You will need an outline of a crown on legal-sized sheets (making enough copies for each child), coloring materials, one pair of scissors, and tape to lead this activity.

Sometimes the Magi or Wise Men are referred to as the Three Kings. Have the children decorate their crowns with signs and symbols of God's Kingdom. For example, instead of jewels, have the children draw hearts for love, doves for peace, flowers, or crosses. Help them to cut out their crowns and tape them around their heads.

Wrapping up Our Love

You will need one small box per child to lead this activity. You will also need wrapping paper with stars printed on it, or with a religious theme. You will also need scissors, tape, paper, and crayons or markers. If you like, you might prepare one star-shaped piece of yellow or sparkly paper ahead of time for each child. You may also want to have ribbon.

Since Christmas Time continues with this glorious solemnity, encourage the children to think of loving actions they can "give" to their parents or other family members. Help them to draw pictures of the loving actions that they can give to their family members. Perhaps they can give a family member a hug, help with a chore, or sing a song for someone.

Next, distribute small boxes to the children, and help them to fold their drawings and place them into the boxes. Instruct them to wrap their boxes in wrapping paper. If you brought ribbon and star-shaped tags, use these to tie a bow and make a gift tag with the recipient's name on it.

Close your gift preparation session with a short prayer of thanks for all the parents and caregivers who make small sacrifices every day for our benefit. Invite them to present their gifts to their loved ones in a special way, as if they were one of the Magi on a trek with God's help from the star's light.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 60:1–6

Psalms 72:1–2, 7–8, 10–11, 12–13
(see 11)

Ephesians 3:2–3a, 5–6

Matthew 2:1–12

Prayer

Lord our God,
in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
you have become one of us.
During this Christmas season,
help us to enter more deeply
into the mystery of the Incarnation.
Help us to recognize your presence
in the Holy Child in the manger,
in the sacraments of the Church,
and in the people around us:
in family, friends, and strangers,
knowing that Christ was born for all
and that we are all children of God.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Did You Know?

... that the Bible never says how many Magi came to see Jesus? Tradition usually counts them as three because three gifts are mentioned. The names have many variations, but they are most commonly known as Melchior of Persia, Caspar (or Gaspar) of India, and Balthazar of Arabia.

Conversation Questions

☉ The Wise Men looked for God's work in the movement of the stars. When have you seen the beauty and grandeur of God's work revealed in the natural world?

☉ The Wise Men and King Herod responded differently to the news of Jesus' birth. How can you respond to God with worship and praise?

Faith in Action

Epiphany is sometimes called "Little Christmas." Jesus was born among the Jews, but he was revealed to the whole world on Epiphany. Celebrate with a special meal. Find recipes for king cake online, or decorate a regular cake to look like a crown. During the meal, share stories of your own epiphanies or the times in your lives when you have encountered God.



Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

A Witness to the Peoples

Focus: To bring forth Christ's justice to the nations.

Catechist's Context

On the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we recall the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. As Jesus steps into the Jordan River, a new age begins. Luke captures this magnificent moment by providing us with a "family portrait." All three persons of the Holy Trinity arrive on the scene. As the Son is baptized, the Spirit descends, and the Father proclaims that Jesus is "my own dear Son."

Focus on Church Teaching

Christians have a duty to serve as witnesses, making the Gospel known (CCC, 2472). Living in solidarity born of faith, rejecting violence and discrimination, and living in loving, just relationships (SNL, 19), we succeed most fully when we recognize one another as persons (SRS, 39).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). When we are baptized, we become the children of God. How did this saint live as a child of God? How did he or she listen to Jesus?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

See Mark 9:7

Alleluia, alleluia.

The heavens were opened and the Father's voice was heard:

This is my beloved Son, hear him.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 3:15–16, 21–22

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

Everyone became excited and wondered, "Could John be the Messiah?"

John said, "I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

After everyone else had been baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. Then as he prayed, the sky opened up, and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven

said, "You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Jesus Is Baptized

When we are baptized, we are cleansed of sin. We start fresh with new lives as servants of God. Jesus didn't need Baptism to cleanse him of sin because he was already sinless. But when he was among us on earth, he wanted to do the things that people did. He wanted to be one of us. He also wanted to teach everyone how important Baptism is. So, he was baptized in the Jordan River. Then we hear in the Gospel that the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus like a dove.

☺ Why does the Holy Spirit appear to us like a dove?

In our world today, we often use the image of the dove to represent peace. In the Book of Genesis, in the Bible, Noah has been on the ark for a long time, in the midst of deep water. He is trying to find out whether the flood is ending, so he sends a dove out to fly around and look for dry land. The dove flies back holding an olive branch, which lets Noah know that the flood is ending.

☺ Do you remember what God said when Jesus was baptized? Why did he say those words?

When God said, "You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you," those words helped the people who were watching realize that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. Jesus is God made flesh. God calls Jesus his beloved Son. We are also beloved children of God. When we pray to God, God tells us in our hearts that we are his beloved children and that he is pleased with us. Let's all take a minute to be with God in the silence of our hearts and feel his love for us. (Pause for a short time of quiet reflection.)

Jesus Was Baptized

Teach the children the following song, to the tune of "Old MacDonald." Once they learn it, let them march around the room as they sing or come up with movements to match the lyrics.

*Jesus was baptized by John
in the river wide.
The Father said, "This is my Son
in whom I'm satisfied."
The Holy Spirit like a dove
came down from heaven up above
with the glory of God's love
as Jesus was baptized.*

God's Spirit Lives in Me!

You will need one dove shape cut out of heavy paper for each child to lead this activity. You may want to have the words "God's Spirit Lives in Me!" preprinted on the doves. You will also need a hole punch, yarn, scissors, and coloring materials.

Give each child a paper dove and distribute coloring materials. If you did not print the words "God's Spirit Lives in Me!" on the doves, help the children to write these words. Discuss baptismal symbols of water, the Sign of the Cross, white garments, and light, and invite children to decorate the doves with these images. When the children finish, punch holes in their doves and string yarn through them so that the children can wear them around their necks as reminders of their baptismal call. Talk together about what they might do while wearing their doves to live out their baptismal call, such as letting others go first, saying please and thank you, helping out with chores, and avoiding name calling or fighting.

Baptism

You will need to arrange for a priest or deacon from your parish to visit your group to help lead this activity. If possible, you may want to lead this activity near your parish's baptismal font.

This week, invite a priest or deacon to visit your class. Ask your guest to bring the elements of Baptism, like candles, a baptismal garment, holy water, and the sacred chrism. Talk to the children about the sacrament of Baptism. Ask if anyone has ever seen someone being baptized, and talk about what happened. Talk about what the water of Baptism means. If possible, you can do this activity near the baptismal font in your parish. Invite each child to dip his or her fingertips into the water and pray the Sign of the Cross. Have the rest of the group respond, "Amen," as each child crosses himself or herself.

If you can, pass around a baptismal candle and a white garment for them to look at, and talk about their significance. Let the children smell the sweet perfume of the chrism. Ask your guest to explain what it means to anoint someone. The name *Christ* means "anointed." We too are anointed at our Baptism and again at Confirmation. Like Jesus, we are anointed for a mission.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 55:1–11 or Isaiah 42:1–4, 6–7

Isaiah 12:2–3, 4bcd, 5–6 (3) or
Psalm 29:1–2, 3–4, 3, 9–10 (11b)

1 John 5:1–9 or Acts 10:34–38

Mark 1:7–11

Prayer

Lord our God,
in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
you have become one of us.
During this Christmas season,
help us to enter more deeply
into the mystery of the Incarnation.
Help us to recognize your presence
in the Holy Child in the manger,
in the sacraments of the Church,
and in the people around us:
in family, friends, and strangers,
knowing that Christ was born for all
and that we are all children of God.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

?? Did You Know?

... that on this feast day, Pope John Paul II
baptized children in the Sistine Chapel?

Conversation Questions

- ☉ How are we called to live as baptized Christians?
- ☉ How does each member of our family live out his or her baptismal call?

Faith in Action

With your child, share family pictures of liturgical events and sacraments. Talk about your child's Baptism and, if possible, the Baptisms of other family members. Explain that everyone who is baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit are members of God's family. Come up with a way to welcome those in your parish who are newly baptized and their families. Perhaps your child can help make a card welcoming the newly baptized into God's family.

Introduction to Ordinary Time



Seasonal Background

When people hear the word *ordinary* they often think of “commonplace” or even “boring.” But in the Church, the weeks of Ordinary Time are numbered. The Latin word *ordinalis*, which refers to numbers in a series, stems from the Latin word *ordo*, from which we get the English word *order*. In this ordered time of the Church year, the faithful are not immersed in the feasting or in the penitence of the other seasons. During Ordinary Time, we have endless opportunities to grow in holiness; we reflect on the life of Jesus. As we listen to Jesus’ words and actions as they have been handed on to us in the Gospel, we continue to contemplate what he reveals and how we can grow to live our lives in imitation of him. During the early weeks of Ordinary Time, we hear how Jesus’ entire ministry unfolds from its early stages through his three-year mission, until his last days on earth and the promise of his Second Coming.

Ordinary Time makes up most of our liturgical year. It refers to those weeks that fall outside the major seasons of Advent, Christmas Time, Lent, and Easter Time. The first section of Ordinary Time begins on the Monday after the first Sunday after January 6, the traditional date of the Feast of

the Epiphany and the end of the liturgical season of Christmas, and ends on Ash Wednesday. Ordinary Time begins again on the Monday after Pentecost and continues until the First Sunday of Advent. No Sunday is ordinary because every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord. It is important to focus young people on the reverence we have for every Sunday of the year.

Celebrating the Season

The liturgical color for this season is green, and indeed this is the color for most of the year. Green is the color of ongoing life and hope. Use green cloths in your worship/prayer space and enhance the space with live plants. Help children reflect on the Sundays and weeks of Ordinary Time as days of growth in faith. Accent your worship/prayer space with various holy cards or religious images that focus on the themes of the readings in order to show the continuity of the season.

Children love to sing, and many of the songs of our faith can help them reflect in Ordinary Time. Working with the refrains of songs frequently heard at Mass gives prayer language and encourages liturgical participation. Take advantage of this long season to explore the liturgical signs that are part of Mass.



Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Discerning God's Call

Focus: To become one with the Lord who calls.

Catechist's Context

The Apostles were seeking, and Jesus' invitation to "Come and see!" changed their lives forever. Explain to the children that they can start to listen in their hearts for God's call, to hear what he wants them to do with their lives.

Focus on Church Teaching

All people are called into relationship with God (CCC, 1). Jesus invites each person to follow him (CCC, 1694) and to hand on the Gospel (CCC, 542–43). Each one of us is called to holiness. We receive this call at our Baptism (CCC, 825). Through Baptism, we are also called into unity with one another (CCC, 836). The evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience guide each baptized person in their response to God (CCC, 914–16).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. We are now in the season of Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time is the longest season of the liturgical year, but it is divided into two parts. Show children the other part on the liturgical calendar. Discuss the purpose of Ordinary Time with them and ask them how we can relate the season of Ordinary Time to our daily lives as followers of Christ. Use the

"Introduction to Ordinary Time" on page 121 to lead the discussion about this season.

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

John 1:41, 17b

Alleluia, alleluia.

We have found the Messiah:

Jesus Christ, who brings us truth and grace.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 1:35–42

Refer to page xi for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

On one occasion John was with two of his followers. When he saw Jesus walking by, he said, "Here is the Lamb of God!" John's two followers heard him, and they went with Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them, he asked, "What do you want?"

They answered, "Rabbi, where do you live?" The Hebrew word "Rabbi" means "Teacher."

Jesus replied, "Come and see!"

It was already about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him and saw where he lived. So they stayed on for the rest of the day.

One of the two men who had heard John and had gone with Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother and tell him, "We have found the Messiah!" The Hebrew word "Messiah" means the same as the Greek word "Christ." Andrew brought his brother to Jesus. And when Jesus saw him, he said, "Simon son of John, you will be called Cephas." This name can be translated as "Peter."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Will You Follow Jesus?

☺ Did you ever have something happen that was so great you couldn't wait to share it with your friends or family?

☺ Did you meet someone you really liked and wanted everyone to know he or she was your friend?

That's what happened in the Gospel today. The people have been thinking that John the Baptist was the one they were waiting for: the Messiah. One day, when John was talking with two of his followers he saw Jesus and he told his friends that *Jesus* was the one they were waiting for. Immediately they started to follow Jesus. They asked questions that you might ask about a new friend: What is your name? Where do you live? Jesus answered them and said, "Come and see." And they did. They followed Jesus from that time on. Andrew wanted to share this event with

his brother, Simon. He exclaimed, "We've found the Messiah!" Imagine the excitement in Andrew's voice when he told Peter. They finally found the person who would change things. He started by changing Simon's name to Peter. Sometimes, when people change their names it is because they are starting a whole new part of their life.

☺ What new life do you think Andrew and Peter were beginning? [They were beginning a life of following Jesus, learning from him, and inviting other people to follow him.]

What happened to John and Andrew and Peter happens to us too. Your parents are excited about being friends of Jesus and they want you to follow him too. They brought you to the church to be baptized. At your Baptism (also called a christening), you received your Christian names, like Simon received a new name. The priest asked your parents and godparents if they were willing to help you become good followers of Jesus. Being a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, is sometimes hard. As new followers, you need good people to help and guide you until you can do it on your own. Now you are meeting new people who help you become better followers of Jesus.

☺ Who are they? [teachers, catechists, friends at church, etc.]

These first followers of Jesus wanted to tell everyone about him and for everyone to meet him. But most important, they wanted them to follow Jesus. We should feel the same.

Followers of Jesus Are All Connected

You will need a large, colorful ball of yarn to lead this activity.

Followers of Jesus have a lot in common. They may live in many different places and do different things, but they all love Jesus and try to live as he taught us.

Have the children sit in a circle on the floor. As you hold the ball of yarn, say what makes you a follower of Jesus (for example, "I follow Jesus when I share with someone"). Hold one end of the yarn and roll the ball to another person across the circle. That person holds the ball and says what makes him or her a follower of Jesus. Then, the child holds the yarn (not letting it go) and rolls the ball to a new person. Continue until everyone has had a chance to tell how they follow Jesus. At the end of the game all children should be holding on to a piece of yarn and a web will have formed in the center of the circle. Explain that everyone who loves Jesus and follows him is connected. It is why we are all one Christian family, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Invite a Guest

This week, invite a priest, deacon, sister, or brother to visit your group and talk about his or her calling and how he or she heard and answered God's call to service. Ask your visitor to mention some of the people who helped him or her to know Jesus, and invite them to talk about some of the things he or she does for God.

Called by Name

You will need index cards or slips of paper, a pen, a small box or small basket, and a musical recording to lead this activity.

Explain that we learn a lot about our calling from God by listening to one another. When someone tells us that we've done something well, it helps us know our talents and gifts. Talents are given to us by God to use for the good of us all. By lovingly giving each other this information, we help each other figure out how to serve God best.

On index cards or slips of paper, print each child's name. Put them all in a box or basket. Have all the children sit in a circle on the floor. Play the music softly and pass the container as long as it's playing. When the music stops, whoever is holding the container will choose a name from the container and pass it to you to read aloud (or they may read it aloud if they can). (If the child chooses his or her name, they should choose another.) When a name is chosen, invite the children to talk about what that person is good at or does well. Keep the feedback positive. Continue until everyone has been affirmed by the group. Then end the activity by praying together that God will help each of you to serve him with your gifts.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time



Scripture Readings

1 Samuel 3:3b–10, 19
Psalm 40:2, 4, 7–8, 8–9, 10
(8a, 9a)
1 Corinthians 6:13c–15a,
17–20
John 1:35–42

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you said to the Apostles,
“Come, follow me.”
You say the same words to us,
today and every day.
Help us to follow you faithfully:
to walk in the way
of your commandments,
to help those who are struggling,
and to love all people
as you love them.
May we rejoice in your presence
with us
as we work to build up
the Kingdom of God,
where you live and reign
with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

?? Did You Know?

. . . that a simple fisherman named Simon went on to become Peter, one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ? Peter set down his fishing nets and became “the rock” on whom Jesus built his Church. Peter led the Christian community after Jesus’ Ascension into heaven, making him the first pope of the Church.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ When Andrew and John met Jesus, they immediately wanted to follow him. Do we open our ears to hear, to listen deeply so we can give a positive response to God?
- ☉ Are our hearts and eyes wide open to recognize the presence of the Lord and hear him tell us, “Come and see”?

Faith in Action

This week, discuss the strengths and gifts you’ve seen in your family. Look for the big and small ways to use these talents to give glory to God. Discern together what God might be calling each of you, including your child, to do to serve others.



Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand

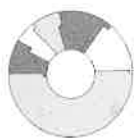
Focus: To welcome the call to new life.

Catechist's Context

Jesus invited Simon and Andrew to catch people instead of fish. The work of bringing people into the net of Christ's love and care is not yet complete. We share in this work by virtue of our Baptism. What stories and experiences about Jesus can we share to attract new followers?

Focus on Church Teaching

God comes to us in many ways. God meets us in the world, in other humans, through revelation, and through grace (CCC, 31–38, 1996–2005). Grace is God's love, freely given to us in our daily lives. It is assistance we cannot deserve. Through it, we participate in the life of God. When we are grateful for God's blessings, it is a sure sign of God's grace (CCC, 1996–97).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). In what ways did this saint proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

See Mark 1:15

Alleluia, alleluia.

The kingdom of God is near:
repent and believe the good news!

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:14–20

Refer to page xi for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and told the good news that comes from God. He said, "The time has come! God's kingdom will soon be here. Turn back to God and believe the good news!"

As Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were fishermen and were casting their nets into the lake. Jesus said to them, "Come with me! I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish." Right then the two brothers dropped their nets and went with him.

Jesus walked on and soon saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat, mend-

ing their nets. At once Jesus asked them to come with him. They left their father in the boat along with the hired workers and went with him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Jesus' Call to New Life

In today's Gospel, two brothers, Simon and Andrew (the same men we heard about last week), were fishing. This was their job, and they were working when Jesus was walking on the shore. Jesus called to them in their boats. They heard him say something very unusual. Jesus asked Andrew and Simon to come with him. He promised to teach them how to fish for people instead of fish!

☉ What did Jesus mean? How could these fishermen catch people?

To catch fish, fishermen needed boats and rods and hooks and nets. They didn't need any of those things to catch people.

☉ What do you think they needed?

They needed to follow Jesus, to act as he did toward the poor and sick and hungry. They needed to tell people about the Word of God. They would not be using their own tools but God's tools: God's Word, God's care, and God's love. Simon and Andrew heard Jesus' call to a new life, a new way

of living. They weren't going to be fishermen but fishers of men. So Simon and Andrew left their boats and followed Jesus. They knew it wouldn't be easy, catching people. It was hard work just to catch fish. It would be much harder to catch people! But they knew God would be helping them. They knew Jesus would be teaching them. They knew this would be important work. Since it was so important, Jesus even gave Simon a new name as he began his new work. We heard it in last week's Gospel passage; do you remember? [Peter] So Jesus continued walking and inviting others to join him. He saw two more fishermen: James and John. Jesus called to them too.

☉ What did they do when they heard Jesus call? [They left their nets and followed Jesus.]

☉ Why do you think these fishermen left their work and decided to follow him? What was so inviting, so special about Jesus?

☉ What would make you follow Jesus?

Jesus calls to us too. We've been called ever since we were baptized. We learn to follow Jesus by putting in practice all that he has taught: by helping people who need us, by knowing the stories about Jesus and sharing those stories with other people who haven't heard them yet, by praying. That's a lot we can do!

Jesus Is Fishing for Me!

You will need enough outlines of fish on multicolored sheets of paper for each child to lead this activity. You will also need crayons and markers and a small basket for your prayer table.

Invite the children to write their name (assist as needed) on the fish and decorate it. Then, one by one, have the children bring up their fish and place them into the basket on your prayer table. Call up each child with these or similar words: "(Name), when you were baptized, Jesus caught you with his love. He wants you to follow him every day."

Fishing for People

Have the class act out the Gospel passage that they have just heard. You will need five volunteers to play the parts of Jesus, Simon, Andrew, James, and John. All of the other children will be people that are being told about Jesus for the first time. After reenacting the Gospel, invite the children to practice telling each other about Jesus. Encourage them to be disciples this week by telling others about Jesus outside of class.

Drop Everything

In today's Gospel, the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James, and John left everything behind—their jobs, even their father—to answer Jesus' call to follow him.

Make a list on the board of the things that the children love and cannot do without. This can include toys, favorite foods, parents, friends, etc. Review the list together. Could the children really imagine dropping all these to follow Jesus? Impress upon the young children that they don't have to drop everything they love but everything that doesn't show others they are followers of Jesus Christ. Can they drop bad attitudes and listen to their parents? Can they drop making unkind comments about a classmate? Can they drop playing with a videogame or a toy one evening and spend more time praying? What else might they drop for God? To God these actions are everything.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time



Scripture Readings

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

Psalms 25:4–5, 6–7, 8–9 (4a)

1 Corinthians 7:29–31

Mark 1:14–20

Prayer

Lord our God,
you sent your Son into the world
to live with us as one of us,
to heal, to teach, to sanctify,
and to proclaim the Good News
of the coming of the Kingdom.
Help us to live our Baptism to the full
and to find ways to do what Jesus did:
to bring joy and life wherever we go,
to lift up the suffering,
and to tell other people
about the new life
Jesus has brought us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Conversation Questions

☉ Jesus goes out to look for his followers. Do we let Jesus find us? Do we hear Jesus calling each of us by name?

☉ Are we brave enough to go out and look for others to know Jesus? What is our mission?

Faith in Action

Among the early Christians, the fish was a symbol of Jesus. You can still see this symbol today on jewelry, bumper stickers, car magnets, etc. It comes from an acrostic made from the Greek word for fish: ΙΧΘΥΣ. Each letter stands for a Greek word:

I (Ι) = Iesous (Jesus)

X (Χ) = Christos (Christ)

Θ (Θ) = Theou (God's)

Υ (Υ) = Uios (Son)

Σ (Σ) = Soter (Savior)

Explain to your child that early Christians used the fish as a secret symbol so that other Christians could find them.

?? Did You Know?

... that the Sea of Galilee is the largest freshwater lake in modern-day Israel? It remains an important site for commercial fishing, the same industry in which the earliest disciples were working when Jesus called them. The sea is also Israel's most important source of drinking water.



Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Harden Not Your Hearts

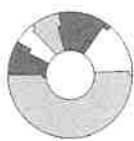
Focus: To recognize the one who acts in God's name.

Catechist's Context

Jesus taught with authority and his authenticity was recognized by both the people and the demons. When we hear Jesus speak God's Word and do great things in the name of God we are amazed. Let this witness of Jesus give us courage to be followers in word and deed.

Focus on Church Teaching

God's love for us calls us to respond. The first commandment tells us that we are only to worship God and not other gods or idols (CCC, 2084–2141). In the fourth commandment we hear that we must respect our parents and by extension those who God has placed in authority. Those leaders, in turn, have obligations toward those entrusted to them (CCC, 2197–2257). Christians must not follow authorities that are contrary to the Gospel, the moral order, or the fundamental rights of persons (CCC, 2242).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). Today we will hear how Jesus expelled a demon from a man. Many people are mastered by certain things or desires and do not

allow themselves to orient their lives to God. How was this saint a model of Christian life?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 4:16

Alleluia, alleluia.

A people in darkness have seen a great light; a radiant dawn shines on those lost in death.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:21–28

Refer to page xi for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

Jesus and his disciples went to the town of Capernaum. Then on the next Sabbath he went into the Jewish meeting place and started teaching. Everyone was amazed at his teaching. He taught with authority, and not like the teachers of the Law of Moses.

Suddenly a man with an evil spirit in him entered the meeting place and yelled, "Jesus from Nazareth, what do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! You are God's Holy One."

Jesus told the evil spirit, "Be quiet and come out of the man!" The spirit shook him. Then it gave loud shout and left.

Everyone was completely surprised and kept saying to each other, "What is this? It must be some new kind of powerful teaching! Even the evil spirits obey him." News about Jesus quickly spread all over that part of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Amazing Words and Deeds!

☺ Who do you know has authority? (You may need to explain what the word means.)

If someone is in authority over you, that usually means we listen to and obey them. Your parents have authority over you. When your mom or dad tells you to do something, you should obey. Your teachers and coaches have authority over you. Police officers have authority over many people.

☺ Can you think of other examples?

When Jesus was alive he never traveled very far because everywhere he went he had to walk. From the outside, he seemed like an ordinary man from a small town, Nazareth. But every time people heard what Jesus taught and saw the miracles and healing acts, they were amazed. He didn't sound like an ordinary person when he talked about how God loved us and wanted us to love him too. He didn't act like an ordinary person

when he helped those who were sick or hungry. His popularity was growing.

In today's Gospel passage, we hear that everyone listened to Jesus. They all said he was the best speaker they ever heard. He was even better than some of the important people who taught them before. While Jesus was speaking, a man who was very ill came into the meeting place. He was shouting and interrupting Jesus. Jesus knew that something inside him was making him act this way. It was something bad. Jesus looked at the man, and just by talking to him and telling the bad spirits to leave him, the man was cured. Can you imagine being there to see how this man was cured? Well, people could not believe what they saw! They began to wonder who this man Jesus really was. He was so amazing in his words and actions, he must be someone very powerful. The people wanted to share what they saw with their friends and neighbors. They began to tell the story about Jesus to everyone they met. These stories spread to other towns, even though Jesus had never been to them. Jesus could heal the sick and command evil because he has supreme authority. That means no one on earth has authority over Jesus. In fact, he has authority over all of creation because he is God. The Scripture we heard today reveals to us again that Jesus was not just a man who could do special things. He has authority. We obey Jesus because he is God. That is truly something amazing.

We Pray for the Sick

You will need a large card with the words "Lord, hear our prayer" to lead this activity.

Remind the children that each time we gather for Mass we pray for all those who are sick. If you do not already do so, remember those in our families who are sick and in need of healing. Show the children the response card and read the words. Explain that this will be their response for each prayer offered. Place it on the prayer table so the children may see the words as they pray.

Next, invite the children to name people they know who are sick and need our prayers (for example, "I pray that my grandma gets well from her surgery in the hospital"). Add: "We pray to the Lord." Instruct the children to respond: "Lord, hear our prayer." This is an easy way to introduce them to intercessory prayer and invite them into greater participation in the liturgy in a way that is appropriate for them.

Evangelization through Art

You will need paper and drawing materials for this activity.

Take the children to view the scenes in the stained-glass windows of your church. Explain to the children what the scenes are telling about Jesus and Mary's life, or about the saint's life. Art was one way that the early Christians shared stories about the Gospel with those who could not read.

Discuss the teachings of Jesus that you've learned together so far this year. Include not just what Jesus said but also what he did to show us how to live according to God's plan for us. Invite the children to choose a favorite story or event from the Gospel and draw a picture to tell about it. Help the children to write captions for their pictures. Then proclaim the Good News by taping the stories to a wall where they'll be seen by the parish.

Teaching with Authority

You will need to arrange to visit your church with the children. You may want to see if your pastor or one of your parish's lectors or readers is available to talk to you.

Arrange to visit your parish church with the children this week. Show the children the ambo, which is where God's Word is proclaimed. Show the children your parish's Book of the Gospels and Lectionary. These books are used when we proclaim the readings at Mass. We believe that Jesus is present in the Scripture that we proclaim at Mass.

If a lector or reader is available to visit with your group, you might invite him or her to talk about the spiritual preparation to be a worthy conduit of God's Word to the assembly.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Scripture Readings

Deuteronomy 18:15–20

Psalms 95:1–2, 6–7, 7–9 (8)

1 Corinthians 7:32–35

Mark 1:21–28

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
in your holy face
we see the face of God.
Help us to keep our eyes
always fixed on you,
so that in everything we do,
we may be pleasing to you.
May we love you and follow you
all the way to God's Kingdom,
where you live and reign
with God the Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

?? Did You Know?

... that in the Church there are priests who are exorcists? The Church has a long history of ministers of the Church praying over people thought to be possessed by unclean spirits. The practice continues today in which each diocese has its own diocesan exorcist, who is commissioned by the local bishop.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ At what times in your life do you feel God's presence?
- ☉ In the face of all evil in the world right now, how much do we trust in God? Explain.

Faith in Action

Authority, authenticity, and author all share the same root word, which means “creator” and carries connotations of accepting responsibility for the content of that which is created. Jesus taught with authority, as author, the one responsible for the covenant, God. Authority and responsibility are both things with which people struggle. Discuss this week how you use authority and how you accept responsibility. What can you learn from Jesus about these two things? Discuss how you honor the authority of others and pray for and support those with great responsibility. What can Jesus teach you about this? If you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.



Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus Heals Many

Focus: To preach the Gospel by healing and teaching.

Catechist's Context

Jesus comes to serve a world that is suffering and in pain. Jesus' healing touch lifts up Peter's mother-in-law. She responds by serving. Jesus heals so many people, spiritually and physically, that he needs to escape into seclusion to pray. Jesus knows spiritual healing is the deepest need. He moves on to drive the demons from people's lives with his preaching.

Focus on Church Teaching

Ideas and ethics do not make one a Christian. It is only through encounter with the person of Jesus that one undergoes a transformation of life (DCE, 1). Belief in Jesus cannot be separated from living the Christian life: living in community, serving others, and forgiveness (EG, 88). While we hope that God's justice will eventually fill the earth, we must dedicate our work to spread the Christian message of love and justice to people living today. The Gospel calls us to work for justice (JM, 35).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Ask the children to find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). Jesus came to the world to serve others. Peter's mother-in-law began

to serve. How was this saint's life an example of service to God and to others?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 8:17

Alleluia, alleluia.

Christ bore our sickness,
and endured our suffering.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:29–39

Refer to page xi for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

As soon as Jesus left the meeting place with James and John, they went home with Simon and Andrew. When they got there, Jesus was told that Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever. Jesus went to her. He took hold of her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she served them a meal.

That evening after sunset, all who were sick or had demons in them were brought to Jesus. In fact, the whole town gathered around the door of the house.

Jesus healed all kinds of terrible diseases and forced out a lot of demons. But the demons knew who he was, and he did not let them speak.

Very early the next morning Jesus got up and went to a place where he could be alone and pray. Simon and the others started looking for him.

And when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "We must go to the nearby towns, so that I can tell the good news to those people. This is why I have come."

Then Jesus went to the Jewish meeting places everywhere in Galilee, where he preached and forced out demons.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Jesus Is Our Example in Work and in Prayer

In today's Gospel, we hear another story of Jesus healing someone who was sick. Peter's mother-in-law was sick and in bed. Jesus felt sorry for her. He went into the house and took her by the hand. He probably said a prayer and asked God to help her. When he did, she got better! She felt so much better and so quickly that she began to serve everyone something to eat.

☺ When the people of the town heard about this story, what did they do?

Everyone in the town who was sick went to the house where Jesus was staying. They stood outside the door and asked Jesus to make them well.

☺ What do you think Jesus did?

He prayed and asked God to make these people better, to cure their diseases. And God did. Many in that town were healed!

At the end of the day, Jesus was very tired. He left the house and went to someplace quiet. Jesus wanted to remind us that it is good to help others and do good work, but it is also important to take time to pray. When we pray we take time to think about what God wants us to do. We have a chance to thank God for being with us and helping us do his work. We can ask God to keep us strong and ready to do more good work. While Jesus was praying, Peter came to him and told him everyone was looking for him. After praying, Jesus was ready to get to work again. He told Peter they had to go to many more towns, many more places, and help the people who lived there. Jesus helped many, many people. We need to follow the example of Jesus and help those people who need us. And don't forget to pray. That is what Jesus did. That is what we must do too.

HELP

Write the letters H-E-L-P vertically on the board and ask the children to identify the letters. Explain that the letters read, "help." Jesus came to earth to help us, and he used his powers of healing to help many people.

Point to the letter H and say: "H stands for 'healing.' Jesus heals us like he healed the man with the evil spirit and Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus can heal our broken and sick bodies and also our broken and sick souls."

Point to the letter E and say: "E stands for 'encouragement.' Have you ever had your mom or dad or your coach praise you and cheer you on when you accomplished something good? Like making a winning play in your game or drawing a colorful picture? That's encouragement. Jesus helps us by encouraging us to go to him for all our needs, especially when we feel sad or low. We have only to invite him into our hearts and lives."

Point to the letter L and say: "L stands for 'love.' Jesus loved us so much that he was willing to die on the cross for our sins."

Point to the letter P and say: "P stands for 'preaching.' Jesus helps us with his preaching—with the words he uses to teach us how to live and how to love. Without Jesus, we wouldn't be able to understand how much God loves us, so we listen to what Jesus is preaching and teaching us."

End the activity with the following prayer:

"Jesus came to help us—to heal us, to encourage us, to love us, and to preach to us. Let us pray: Dear Jesus, thank you so much for coming to help us. We need your help every day. We need your help when our bodies and souls are sick. Thank you for your healing. We need your help when we're feeling down and sad. Thank you for your encouragement. We need your help to learn how to love. Thank you for your example of unselfish love. And we need your help to learn about God. Thank you for your words. You live and reign with God

the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."

Lean on Me

Have the children sit in a circle on the floor. Show them to place their feet flat, knees up, and then cross their arms. Explain that we all need each other and that as brothers and sisters in Christ, we help each other. In today's Gospel, Jesus helped the relative of his friend Peter. He also helped a lot of people he didn't know who asked him for help. Now, have the children try to stand up without using their hands. The children should have difficulty: trying to stand up without help is like trying to get through life without asking for help. It's very hard. Now have the children find a partner and they will sit back-to-back in the same position as before. Now direct them to stand. This time, the pairs will be using each other to lever themselves up to stand more easily. Explain: "Having your partner's help makes standing up easier! Having Jesus' help makes it possible for us to lead good, happier lives. Jesus came to help us because he loves us."

Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

This week, invite a priest to visit your group and talk about the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Ask him to bring the items he takes when he visits someone to administer the sacrament and to briefly explain what these things are and how they're used. Discuss how visiting and anointing someone is a way to preach the Good News. Praying for those who are ill is also a way to share the God's love. Say a prayer together for those who are ill.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Scripture Readings

Job 7:1–4, 6–7

Psalm 147:1–2, 3–4, 5–6 (see 3a)

1 Corinthians 9:16–19, 22–23

Mark 1:29–39

Prayer

Lord our God,
you sent your Son into the world
to live with us as one of us,
to heal, to teach, to sanctify,
and to proclaim the Good News
of the coming of the Kingdom.
Help us to live our Baptism to the full
and to find ways to do what Jesus did:
to bring joy and life wherever we go,
to lift up the suffering,
and to tell other people
about the new life
Jesus has brought us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Conversation Questions

☉ Jesus did not come to be served but to serve. Peter's mother-in-law began to serve once she was healed. Are our lives a service to God and to our brothers and sisters?

☉ Jesus is also aware of his mission through prayer, and he takes time to pray. How often have we prayed for healing body and soul and for guidance?

Faith in Action

At every stage of life, each of us makes important decisions that have an impact on us and those around us. Teach your child that we all need quiet reflection and prayer before these important decisions are made. We can call on the Holy Spirit, or God the Father, or Jesus Christ to help guide us. You might share some crossroads or key decisions you have made and how prayer helped guide you in making a decision.

?? Did You Know?

... that the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick may be received each time we suffer a serious illness, or periodically for those with chronic illness or those who are suffering from old age. God's abundant gifts of healing power and mercy are received in these sacraments.



Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

God Wills Fullness of Life for Us

Focus: To call on God for help.

Catechist's Context

We don't pray to change God but to open ourselves to God's changing us. The man with leprosy in this Sunday's Gospel, isolated by the disease (representing sin), prays to be changed. Each of us is challenged to consider how the touch of Jesus Christ has changed us. Because he has, we can't help but proclaim the Good News!

Focus on Church Teaching

Suffering is a reality in our world. We know that violence and oppression are contrary to the plan of God, and it is the Church's vocation to proclaim this Good News (JM, 5). We are able to hope because of Jesus. The Church bears witness to it, bringing that hope to all (CL, 7). Suffering cannot have the last word. Our love and preference calls us to alleviate the suffering of the hungry, those in need, the homeless, those without medical care, and those without hope for the future (SRS, 42).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). In his gratitude, the leper courageously and without hesitation tells others the good that Jesus has done for him. How was this saint a

similar witness, someone who fearlessly led others to accept the Good News?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 7:16

Alleluia, alleluia.

A great prophet has appeared among us;
God has visited his people.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:40–45

Refer to page xi for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

A man with leprosy came to Jesus and knelt down. He begged, "You have the power to make me well, if only you wanted to."

Jesus felt sorry for the man. So he put his hand on him and said, "I want to! Now you are well." At once the man's leprosy disappeared, and he was well.

After Jesus strictly warned the man, he sent him on his way. He said, "Don't tell anyone about this. Just go and show the priest that you are well. Then take a gift to the temple as Moses com-

manded, and everyone will know that you have been healed.”

The man talked about it so much and told so many people that Jesus could no longer go openly into a town. He had to stay away from the towns, but people still came to him from everywhere.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Fullness of Life

☺ What is leprosy? Have you ever heard of this disease?

Leprosy is a skin disease. People who had it had painful sores on their skin. In Jesus’ time, people with leprosy were not allowed to come near healthy people because the disease was contagious. That means that other people could have caught it by being near those affected. Today we have medicines that treat this skin disease, but in Jesus’ time, those who had leprosy were ordered to live far outside of the town. They couldn’t work or get food. So the man in the Gospel would have gotten into a lot of trouble for coming near Jesus. But he trusted Jesus so much that he wasn’t afraid. Listen also to the trust in his words to Jesus: “You have the power to make me well, if only you wanted to.”

☺ Why do you think Jesus wasn’t afraid he’d get sick if the man was near him?

Jesus’ love was greater than any fear or worry of disease. Jesus is God, and God wants each of us to have a full and joyous life. The man had great faith in God. God wants all of us to have that strong of a faith too and to trust in his love.

☺ If the healing of the man was such a good thing, why didn’t he allow the man to tell everyone what happened?

Jesus knew that if people found out he could work miracles of healing, they’d come pouring out just to be cured. Jesus was meant to do more than cure people. His mission was to teach and to tell people about living fully in God’s love. But when something that wonderful happens to us, we can’t keep it to ourselves! The man was so happy he had to tell everyone how he was healed. That’s how God’s love makes us feel. It fills us with joy and we can’t keep it in. We want to share this love with others so that they too can experience that fullness of life in God.

Sense of Touch

You will need various items that the children may touch to lead this activity. Suggested items: soft (small stuffed toy or cotton balls), rough (sandpaper), smooth (sheet of wax paper), sharp (pinecone), etc.

Display the items you brought on a table in the front of the room. Ask what we do with our hands [touch, feel, hold]. Invite volunteers to come forward, one at a time, to touch one of the items you brought and to describe to the others what they feel like.

Today's Gospel story is another one about healing and how important the sense of touch is. Remind the children that no one touched those who suffered from leprosy. Ask children what it might feel like if they were never hugged. A man with leprosy came to Jesus and asked to be healed. Jesus did not make the man go away. Jesus healed him; he touched the man with his hand and with his love.

Explain to the children that their touch is important too. Just like the things that are rough, soft, smooth, prickly, etc., their touch can convey different things. When they use their hands to shove others or hit, they are not using touch in a good or positive way. When they use their hands to hug or pat or high-five, they are using touch in a loving, happy way. In Jesus' healing touch, he conveyed concern and love. The children too can use their hands to offer others love and care.

Hurts That Need Healing

Help the children to become aware of all the wounds and hurts in the world that need help and healing. On the board, draw a simple figure, such as a gingerbread person with face, torso, arms, and legs. Ask children for suggestions of "wounds" or "hurts," such as hunger, homelessness, joblessness, war, illness, and so on. For each suggestion, draw a wound

spot on the figure and list each suggestion on the board.

The figure you have drawn is very much like the man suffering from leprosy who asked Jesus for healing. Then explain to the children that we all carry some kind of wound or hurt that we can bring to Jesus for healing. The world also experiences pain and suffering. Go over each wound and ask the children how we might bring healing. For example, we can pray to Jesus to help ease hunger in the world. We can also help by participating in a food drive or helping to serve food to those who are hungry. Then erase the "wound" from the figure. Continue in this way until the figure is made clean of wounds.

Prayer Chains

You will need one-inch-wide and nine-inch-long strips cut from construction paper, tape or glue, and coloring materials.

Begin by explaining to the children that people who suffered from leprosy in the time of Jesus experienced loneliness and isolation because others didn't come near them for fear of catching the disease themselves. Ask the children to imagine the man in the Gospel who had no friends. No one would talk to him or even touch him. Only Jesus showed compassion by healing him.

The children will make prayer chains they can use as reminders to pray for their friends. Ask the children what they like to do for their friends. How do they help them or make them happy? One of the easiest ways to help friends and make them happy is to pray for them.

On the strips of paper, help the children to write the names of friends (one per strip). Have the children bring you each strip to loop and link into a chain. Once you complete the chain, gather the children together to pray for all the people named on each link. Ask for Jesus' help and blessing for each person.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Scripture Readings

Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46

Psalms 32:1–2, 5, 11 (7)

1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

Mark 1:40–45

Prayer

Lord our God,
you sent your Son into the world
to live with us as one of us,
to heal, to teach, to sanctify,
and to proclaim the Good News
of the coming of the Kingdom.
Help us to live our Baptism to the full,
and to find ways to do what Jesus did:
to bring joy and life wherever we go,
to lift up the suffering,
and to tell other people
about the new life Jesus has
brought us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

?? Did You Know?

... that leprosy is a disease that persists to our day? This disease continues to spread in some parts of the world because many people do not have access to the care and medicines they need. Medicines to treat leprosy have been available, however, since the 1940s.

Conversation Questions

☉ Who are the “lepers” of modern society? Who is ostracized, marginalized, ignored?

☉ Are we truly open to being more like Jesus if it means reaching out and “touching” the individuals we usually avoid?

Faith in Action

Sometimes, whether intentionally or unintentionally, people who have serious illnesses are treated like outcasts by others in the community. People might not know how to act around a person with cancer or someone who has recently had an amputation, for example, and so they stay away. Consider visiting a seriously ill person with your child (after you have checked with their family that they are well enough for visitors). Demonstrate through your actions that even though the person might have a breathing tube or might be in a wheelchair, there is nothing to fear about the person. Becoming comfortable with people who are sick or disabled at a young age will help your child to grow into a caring adult.



Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

God Makes Everything New

Focus: To believe in God's healing forgiveness.

Catechist's Context

Each one of us encounters suffering, of body and of spirit. We look to God to be healed. Sometimes we require the help of friends and family to bring us to the point at which we recognize our need for healing and forgiveness. The compassionate spirit of Jesus is always there to stretch out his hand and make us whole.

Focus on Church Teaching

Created and sustained by God, the world has become enslaved by sin. But freedom comes through the person of Christ, who breaks the bonds through his death and Resurrection (GS, 2). Jesus makes all things new, redeeming history (SacCar, 10). Jesus' ministry is characterized by healing and forgiving, and therefore there are both physical and spiritual components of the salvation he brings (RMI, 14). Having received new life in Christ, people have love to share with others (JDDJ, 22).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi–viii for more information about the saints). Jesus taught us to serve, to be humble, to welcome and care for others in order to

reach the Kingdom of God. It is not for the powerful. How did this saint focus on service and humility?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 4:18

Alleluia, alleluia.

The Lord sent me to bring good news to the poor and freedom to prisoners.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 2:1–12

Refer to page xi for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

Jesus went to Capernaum, and a few days later people heard that he was at home. Then so many of them came to the house that there was not even standing room left in front of the door.

Jesus was still teaching when four people came up, carrying a crippled man on a mat. But because of the crowd, they could not get him to Jesus. So they made a hole in the roof above him and let the man down in front of everyone.