

Children Celebrate!

Liturgy of the Word with Children

LEADER'S GUIDE

Winter 2023–2024

YEAR A/B

November 26, 2023

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

through

February 18, 2024

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

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Children Celebrate!

Liturgy of the Word with Children

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Sunday Readings

For your convenience, each Sunday's Lectionary readings for the Liturgy of the Word with Children can be downloaded from pflaum.com. It's as easy as 1-2-3!

1. Go to **pflaum.com/readings** for a list of Sunday readings (updated at the end of each month).
2. Click on the date you want. That Sunday's readings will open in a PDF.
3. Print or download the file.

For more about the Sunday Readings, see the Introduction to this Leader's Guide.

Weekly Gospel Reflection Videos!

Available to subscribers of *Children Celebrate!*

Visit <http://bit.ly/3x37mJb> for weekly Gospel Reflection videos. These videos can be used within your Children's Liturgy of the Word program, or shared with parents and families to view at home.

Children Celebrate! Director's Manual

For an easy-to-follow Director's Manual, go to **pflaum.com/liturgy-of-the-word** and click on "Bonus Resources" and then "Program Directors." There you will find a manual that outlines practical steps for establishing a program, recruiting and training volunteers, and creating the proper environment and liturgical flow.

In addition, you will learn how to most effectively incorporate *Children Celebrate!* materials into your program. Additional resources are also suggested.

Children Celebrate! Children's Liturgy of the Word – MP3 Album

With joyful melodies, call-and-response segments, and child-friendly lyrics, John Burland's inviting liturgical pieces are perfect for Children's Liturgy of the Word programs. For example, "Go Now and Listen to God's Word" can be sung as children are dismissed from the assembly, and "Yes, Lord, I Believe" is a jubilant option for singing the Creed, helping little ones to profess their faith.

Visit **giamusic.com** and search "Children Celebrate" to order.

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This Issue's Themes

DATE	SUNDAY	THEME
November 26, 2023	OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE	Bless the Poor and You'll Be Blessed
December 3, 2023	1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Jesus Says Be Ready
December 10, 2023	2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Turn Back to God
December 17, 2023	3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Get Ready for the Lord!
December 24, 2023	4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Nothing Is Impossible With God
December 31, 2023	HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH	Listen to God
January 7, 2024	EPIPHANY OF THE LORD	Guide Us to Jesus
January 14, 2024	2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Here Am I, Lord
January 21, 2024	3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	We Are Called to Follow Jesus
January 28, 2024	4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Jesus Keeps Us Safe
February 4, 2024	5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Jesus Heals Us
February 11, 2024	6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Jesus Heals Everyone
February 18, 2024	1ST SUNDAY OF LENT	Believe the Good News

Using *Children Celebrate!*

Children Celebrate! is a complete step-by-step resource for celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with Children. The two components of *Children Celebrate!* are this Leader's Guide and the Children's Leaflets, a book of tear-out, take-home sheets.

LEADER'S GUIDE *(each week has two parts)*

I. Preparation provides the leader with information about the week's Scripture readings and how they relate to children today. Its elements are the following:

- **Today's Readings** cites the exact Scripture readings you will be using that day. (Remember, these readings do not always match the readings chosen for the adults. See more about the

readings on page 6.) A theme sets the tone of that day's liturgy.

- **Prepare with Prayer** helps center you on the task at hand, which is not only helping children hear and understand God's Word but also hearing and understanding God's Word **through** the children.
- **Scripture Background** helps you understand the readings and prepare to break open the Word.
- **Prepare the Meeting Space** gives you suggestions for enhancing the environment for that day's celebration. Review this section a few days before the liturgy.

- **Suggested Music** provides suggestions for appropriate songs during the liturgy. Information on where to find each piece of suggested music is on page 62.
- **Children's Connections** explains each week's theme and Scripture message as it applies to children today.
- **More About...** provides additional background about a topic that is related to this week's liturgy.
- **Using the Children's Leaflet** provides brief background information about the take-home sheet.
- **Activity** provides a reproduction of the take-home sheet. Solutions to puzzles are shown as needed.

II. The Liturgy of the Word is a ready-made liturgy specifically written for that week's readings and theme. Its elements are the following:

- **Gathering** helps the children settle into their places. Playing appropriate background music or singing a song provides a transition into an attitude of prayer.
- **Collect** sets the tone for the worship experience.
- **Focus Statements** for each of the readings help you give the children a key idea to listen for and to help them better understand the theme of the readings.
- **Responsorial Psalm and Gospel Acclamation** provide liturgically appropriate responses for the children to use.
- **Homily** gives you starter ideas for interesting, creative, and relevant reflections on the Gospel.
- **Profession of Faith** is a simple and interactive declaration of what we believe as Catholics.
- **Prayer of the Faithful** are the prayers for the needs of the world, the Church, and the community. These are often a common first step for children into spontaneous prayer and can be powerful moments for children.

- **Return to Assembly** provides the leader with a cue to prepare the children to rejoin the main assembly and to remind them to take home a Children's Leaflet.

CHILDREN'S LEAFLETS *(each leaflet is two-sided)*

Front Side

- **Today's Readings** gives the Scripture citations for that Sunday's liturgy.
- **We Pray** is a short prayer for children based on the week's theme.
- **The Word of God This Week** is a summary of the day's Gospel story.



Back Side

- **Activity** provides an entertaining way to reinforce the Gospel message.
- **Faith Focus** highlights how the Gospel message can pertain to the family.
- **Family Activity** provides practical suggestions to families on how to put the Gospel into action at home.



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION VIDEOS

- **How to access the videos:** Visit <http://bit.ly/3x37mJb> to view the videos for this quarter.
- **What's included?** Each weekly video includes a Gospel Reflection, Saint Spotlight, Closing Prayer, and Reflection Question.
- **Promote:** Share these videos with those assisting with Children's Liturgy of the Word for use during your program, as well as with parents and families.

Introduction

What Is Liturgy of the Word with Children?

Liturgy of the Word with Children is a worship experience geared especially for children. It mirrors the worship experience of the larger community, with a style that is engaging and interactive. Jesus himself recognized that children have a pure spirituality, and he made them the primary spiritual model for all believers.

Liturgy of the Word with Children is not formal religious education, nor is it intended to be a substitute for attendance at religious education sessions. Rather, it should be considered a partner to religious education programs. Both are important for a child's spiritual development, just as continuing faith formation and growth in spirituality are important for adults.

The Word of God has a message that is as relevant and fitting for children as it is for adults. The children, however, often fail to hear the message simply because the adult vocabulary is beyond their comprehension. Liturgy of the Word with Children offers an experience for the children to hear Scripture in words they understand and to share their own understanding of God's Word.

Celebrating the Liturgy of the Word in this way is an empowering experience, giving children a foundation for understanding and appreciating Scripture. Over several years, the children not only become comfortable with hearing and discussing God's Word but also gain an understanding of and appreciation for their liturgical heritage as Catholics.

When and How Do the Children Leave the Assembly?

The celebration of the Liturgy of the Word with Children follows the same structure as the Liturgy of the Word for the entire assembly. In fact, it begins with the Introductory Rites, which are celebrated in the large assembly, where the children are seated with their families.

After the Introductory Rites, the presider invites any children wishing to participate to join the leader and proceed to the worship space set aside for them. They return after the Prayer of the Faithful to celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist with the entire community.

What About the Readings?

The readings in the children's Lectionary sometimes differ from those used in the adult Lectionary. When planning liturgies to be used with children, the Church allows some flexibility in the number and choice of readings on Sundays and feast days.

According to the *Directory for Masses with Children*, "If three or even two readings appointed on Sundays or weekdays can be understood by children only with difficulty, it is permissible to read two or only one of them, but the reading of the Gospel should never be omitted" (Chapter III, No. 42). In addition, because of the difficulty some children may have in understanding certain verses, it is sometimes possible to omit one or another verse from the reading. (For a complete reading of the directives regarding selection of readings, see the *Directory for Masses with Children*, Chapter III, Nos. 41–47.)

In *Children Celebrate!* we follow the readings from the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, which is approved for use in all dioceses of the United States by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. We determine themes and make suggestions for each Sunday's liturgy based on these readings. For this reason, it is important that you check each week's citations as listed in this Leader's Guide before finalizing your plans for that Sunday's celebration.

Preview the Readings

If you do not have access to a children's Lectionary while you prepare your liturgy, you have three other options for previewing the readings for each Sunday.

1 Go to our website (pflaum.com/readings), click on the date you need, and print or download the readings.

2 The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* uses readings from the Old Testament and Book of Psalms. A select number of the refrains for the Responsorial Psalms are taken from the *Contemporary English Version* © 1991 by the American Bible Society. Readings from the New Testament are taken from the *Contemporary English Version, Bible for Today's Family: New Testament* © 1991 by the American Bible Society. The CEV can be purchased at stores and at americanbible.org.

3 Go to americanbible.org. Scroll over BIBLE RESOURCES. Scroll down and click on BIBLE SEARCH. Under the search box, click on Search Options. Select CEV Contemporary English Version (US Version). Enter the book, chapter, and verses that you need, such as Luke 15:11–32.

Where Do I Begin?

Your first step to prepare a Sunday session should be to pray for guidance. "Prepare with Prayer" opens each week's background material. It will help you begin to focus your mind and open your heart to God's message. Remain in prayer as long as you like.

Read the Scripture and background material in their entirety. Although the story may be familiar, you may see it with new eyes when challenged to lead a reflection on it. The background material will give you an idea of the social and historical context behind the Scripture.

Gather and write down your thoughts for the reflection. Look at them and meditate on them for a while. Certain themes or ideas will come through. Create an outline for your reflection based on these ideas.

Be sure to read through the Prepare the Meeting Space and The Liturgy of the Word sections well in advance so that you are not taken by surprise by any preparations you should have made or items you will need on hand. Allow plenty of time to set up and prepare before the session.

What Else Should I Know?

LITURGICAL COLORS

This edition of *Children Celebrate!* covers Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe through the First Sunday of Lent. For Christ the King, the liturgical color is white or gold. To represent the penitential season of Lent, the color used is purple/violet. Use the liturgical colors on the table where you place the Lectionary or in other elements you use in your worship area.

MOVEMENT

Introduce movement wherever you feel it could be appropriate in the liturgy. Young muscles cry out to be used often, and this physical need causes the restlessness that some adults find irritating. Even the simple act of lifting their arms in prayer or carrying some small object to the front of the room can give children a refreshing but orderly break from being in one position for too long.

Trust Yourself

Finally, remember that *Children Celebrate!* is a complete resource that you can trust to be liturgically sound while also being creative. Nevertheless, you are the leader and you must be comfortable with what you want to do each week. Feel free to use (and trust) your own ideas as well.

There is no limit to what God can work through each of us. Your time with these children will have God's blessing and will be immeasurably fruitful. Enjoy!

Contemplating Christmas



Depending on your age, glancing through an old *Baltimore Catechism* either takes you somewhere familiar or somewhere you've never been. Whether or not you like the trip might depend on what you already know and what you would like to know about your Catholic faith.

As we journey through another season of Advent, I am struck by how little the old catechism says of the Incarnation. For example, it's easy to find an answer to the question, "Why did Christ suffer and die?" Picking up on a relatively new explanation in Church history (one that is only 1,000 years old) the old catechism said, "Christ suffered and died for our sins."

Pauline Theology

Not even Saint Paul believed that, according to scholars who caution against misinterpreting the sacrifi-

cial imagery in some of his letters. "It is not Pauline teaching that the Father willed the death of his Son to satisfy the debts owed to God or to the devil by human sinners," writes New Testament scholar Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., in #74 of "Pauline Theology" (*The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1990). Rather, it was Anselm of Canterbury in 1098 who first proposed this idea.

For Christ's Passion and Death there are other explanations, by no means heretical, that have enjoyed a long and rich history in the Church. One holds that it would be more accurate to say, "Christ died because of human sin." In the end, though, we have to admit that condensing the Catholic faith into a series of one-liners makes about as much sense as basing a vote on a few television sound bites.

Why was Christ born?

Besides offering limited answers to its questions, sometimes the old *Baltimore Catechism* left important questions unanswered. For example, why was Christ born? The closest it came to providing an answer was when it addressed the question of why Christ lived a relatively long earthly life (for that time in history): "Christ lived so long on earth to show us the way to Heaven by His teachings and example."

While here, too, we shouldn't assume that the message Jesus brought us was simply a promise of eternal life, at least the old catechism's answer implied that Christ was not born only to die. If that were the case, he could have suffered a miserable death in infancy at King Herod's hands—or even earlier from some dreaded prenatal condition.

No, Christ's birth accomplished something much more than setting him on a path to his death. It was through his conception, birth, extended life, and death that he fully entered into the human experience. The mystery of his Incarnation lies at the very heart of who he is—Son of God and Son of Mary, fully divine and fully human.

According to John the Evangelist and Paul the Apostle, Christ was born that we might see God for ourselves and feel the depth of God's love for us. In Colossians 1:15, Paul calls Christ "the image of the invisible God."

God so loved the world

We easily forget the magnanimity of God in choosing to become visible for us, in taking on the flesh of a living human being. Look at the life Jesus led from day one, and leave out none of the ugly, noisy, itchy, foul, or bitter details of someone who has chosen to see, hear, feel, taste, and smell the world as we do. Does anyone really believe there were no annoying insects or fetid odors in a stable that sheltered farm animals?

Even before he was born, did the child feel all the tensions his mother felt during a pregnancy that was so difficult on so many levels? What imprint was left on his young brain as his family fled from all that was familiar to them for the safety of an unknown country? Even after they returned home, what was it like living in a land where only the rich could expect to live beyond the age of forty and the working poor comprised 90 percent of the population?

These are questions we must ask ourselves when we begin to contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation. In the beginning Christ was whose Son? Why was he sent to live among us and to die for us? What kind of father would ask that of his son, and what kind of son would agree to go?

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3:16, "so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." In another passage, Jesus says, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)

Scripture reveals that seeing the Father in the human face of his Son in fact was the beginning of the world's redemption. Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., sums up John's Gospel like this: The Father showed the world his love by sending his Son to make God visible. Only in seeing God does anyone believe in him, and only in believing in him does anyone reach fullness of life. (See "Johannine Theology," #59, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1990.)

We easily forget the magnanimity of God in choosing to become visible for us, in taking on the flesh of a living human being.

Master of the Universe, Servant of All

What the Son of God gave up to do this is a mystery beyond human comprehension—for who among us has been to Heaven or sat at God's right hand? Paul attempts an explanation when he writes that although Christ "was in the form of God," he "did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6-7)

He, who was Master of the Universe, who could command things to be and they were, decided to become, in Shakespeare's vivid terms, an "infant, mewling and puking" in his mother's arms.

It is one thing to be born a slave and live as a slave without ever knowing anything better, but what if you are born to royalty and choose a servant's fate so that your country's low-born might have a chance to get to know you?

So when we are contemplating the mystery of our salvation, let's not focus exclusively on Good Friday. Before there ever was a Mount Calvary, there was an infinite Somewhere Else—where a loving Son said an infinite yes to his loving Father and to the world his Father created.

Resources

Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. "Pauline Theology." Englewood Cliffs, NJ: *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1990.

Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B. "Johannine Theology." Englewood Cliffs, NJ: *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1990.



Today's Readings

Ezekiel 34:11–12, 14–16abce
Psalm 23:1–2ab, 2c–3, 5–6
1 Corinthians 15:20–24a
Matthew 25:31–46

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a white or gold cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a potted plant or vase of fresh flowers
- ☐ a statue or portrait of Christ the King.

Have ready for use during the Gathering activity:

- ☐ modern-day prose version of the story behind the song “Good King Wenceslas” (Visit bit.ly/1qxiBme and right click the page to print the story. Because of time constraints, use only the last part of the story, beginning with the paragraph whose opening words are, “The next day, the feast day of Saint Stephen”)

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

“**LOVE God**” (*Seeds CD-2, Track #21*) or “**The Great Commandment**” (*Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #18*)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

“**Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia**” (*Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24*)

Bless the Poor and You'll Be Blessed

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

*The LORD is sitting in his sacred temple
on his throne in heaven.
He knows everything we do because
he sees us all.*

(PSALM 11:4)

Scripture Background

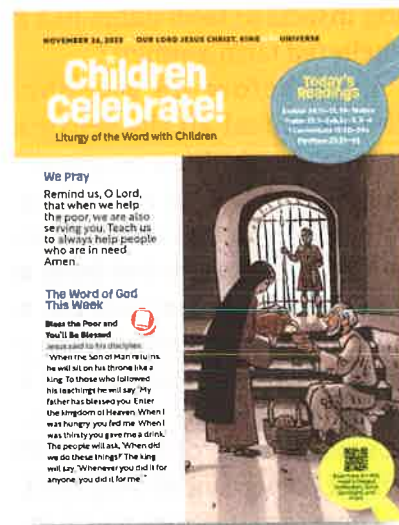
The Book of Ezekiel was written during the tumultuous times that produced the destruction of Jerusalem and the Chosen People's 70-year exile in Babylon. Preceding today's passage is a section in which God scolds the leaders of Judah, particularly King Zedekiah, for being careless shepherds of the people.

Too long these rulers had grasped after power and wealth while neglecting the poor and the weak in their midst. Out of pity for his misruled people, God promises to send them a new king from the line of David, someone who will govern as wisely and well as David once did. Christians later came to understand these words as a prophecy about Christ and the messianic kingdom he would inaugurate.

Today's reading from 1 Corinthians turns on a comparison Saint Paul makes between Christ and Adam. Through Adam, sin and death came into the world, but through Christ, grace and eternal life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples about the Final Judgment. When he says that the people of all nations will be brought before the Son of Man, he indicates that the final reckoning will include believers and unbelievers alike.

One standard will be applied to all, however—how well each person, while alive, treated his or her neighbors. The examples of neighborly love that Christ gives form the basis for what we know today as the Corporal



Works of Mercy. These are seven good deeds required of every faithful Catholic: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit those in prison, and bury the dead.

Not only should one perform these actions individually but one also should strive to build a society in which no one ever suffers from insufficient food, water, clothing or shelter or feel the loneliness of abandonment, especially during times of sickness or imprisonment. On the rock of unfailing love, the Kingdom of God is built

CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

Once a young boy's dad came home after a heavy round of drinking and collapsed on his bed to sleep it off. The rest of the family, ignoring Dad as they usually did when he came home like this, sat in the living room watching TV.

Soon there arose from the back bedroom the sound of moaning and the words, "I'm thirsty; somebody get me a drink!" The teenagers looked at each other and giggled, most likely thinking that Dad was getting what he deserved. Their mother rolled her eyes at yet another episode in her trying life with this man.

The youngest boy in the family, however, felt sorry for his dad and went to the kitchen to get him a glass of water. Even while his older brothers and sisters laughed at him for wanting to help, he continued on his mission. By the time he approached his dad's bedside, most of the water had spilled out of the glass he carried in his shaky hand. When the man gruffly shouted, "You call this a drink of water?" and threw the glass against a wall, the boy scrambled out of the room in fear.

This true story illustrates the empathy that comes naturally to most children. It also illustrates the cynicism, which can begin in one's teenaged years, that diminishes empathy. How many times should a person be kind to an addict who refuses to get his act together? Perhaps Jesus' answer would be, "Seven times seventy."

Saint Teresa of Kolkata would add that we should try to help those in pain even if success isn't certain. The boy failed to quench his father's thirst, failed to

persuade his family that doing so was the right thing to do, and failed to change his father's alcoholism. The boy was too young to understand the term "enable," much less be able to weigh its merits against what seemed to him a simple act of kindness. His faithfulness to the spirit of today's Gospel—and we have God's Word on this—will be remembered on the last day.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn Jesus' teaching about helping others through, a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork about Jesus and ask the children what Jesus is doing in the picture.

More About ...

Good King Wenceslas

The song about Wenceslas is often played at Christmastime even though it is not about the birth of Christ. It does, however, illustrate the kind of love Christ brought into the world. Such love gives without hope of receiving in return. It gives freely and spontaneously, as soon as a need is detected, without regard for the needy person's physical or psychological condition, wealth, social status, race, religion, creed—or even likability.

When preparing today's Gathering activity, you might find these online resources helpful:

- For a free audio download of a professional storyteller's account of Good King Wenceslas, plus complete lyrics to the song, go to bit.ly/1qxiBme.
- For a music video of the song, search the Internet or YouTube.com for "Good King Wenceslas." There are many from which to choose, including a Bing Crosby version and one by the Irish Rovers.

HE
WILL
SEPARATE
THE
GOOD
FROM
THE
BAD.



Leaflet Activity

This week's family activity invites parents and children to work together on finding a way to help others in their parish or community. The children's activity spells out what Jesus tells us in today's Gospel.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

Invite the children to be seated in the worship space. Tell them that today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. Christ is king of Heaven and earth and rules over everyone with wisdom and love.

Then say, "Long ago in the land of Bohemia, there lived a wise and good king, a saintly man named Wenceslas, who tried to imitate Christ in his care for his people. Still today, there is a song that people sing about him, often at Christmastime. Please listen carefully as I read you the story that the song tells."

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Bow your heads for the Opening Prayer. Our response to each short prayer will be, "How great is your love, O Lord." Christ our King, you care for us as a shepherd cares for his sheep. How great is your love, O Lord.

CHILDREN: How great is your love, O Lord.

LEADER: You look for those who are lost and bring back those who have wandered off. How great is your love, O Lord.

CHILDREN: How great is your love, O Lord.

LEADER: You bandage those who are hurt and protect the ones who are weak. How great is your love, O Lord.

CHILDREN: How great is your love, O Lord.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: In today's First Reading, God promises to help his Chosen People during a time of trouble for them.

Read Ezekiel 34:11-12, 14-16abce. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken.

Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

CHILDREN: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 23:1-2ab, 2c-3, 5-6.*

Second Reading

LEADER: In today's Second Reading, Saint Paul tells how Christ will come again and raise us to new life in God's kingdom.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-24a. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Gospel Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a story to explain what will happen to all the living and dead when he comes again.

LEADER: The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Matthew 25:31-46. Then say,
"The Gospel of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Begin by reading again aloud Verse 45 of the Gospel. Then review the good deeds mentioned in the Gospel by asking these questions:

- What should you do when you know of someone who's hungry?
- What should you do when you know of someone who's thirsty?
- What should you do when you know of someone who's new to your neighborhood, town, or school?
- What should you do when you know of someone who doesn't have enough good clothes to wear?
- What should you do when you know of someone who is sick?
- If you're a grown-up, what should you do if you know someone who is in jail?

The true story given in Children's Connections about the young boy might be too frightening for the children to hear. Some in the group could be living in a home with an alcoholic parent. Relay instead a time when you, too, tried to help someone yet was rejected. Stress the idea that it's the effort that counts in God's eyes, not always the actual results. Also help children see that they are not too young to begin doing the good deeds described in today's Gospel.

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, "I do." Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, who loves all the people he ever created?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who will come again on the last day to judge the living and the dead?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life, who helps us live lives of loving service?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in the holy Catholic Church, the community of God dedicated to showing the world that God is love?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: As members of God's holy family, the Church, let us pray for all those who need our prayers. Our response to each petition will be, "Hear us, O Lord." That our Holy Father, all bishops and priests, and all sisters and brothers will do all they can to help the poor and needy, we pray:

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: That all the world's poor and needy will receive what they need to live in peace and happiness, we pray:

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: That each of us here will take every chance we get to help and serve others, we pray:

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Loving God, we praise you and thank you for making Christ your Son our Lord and King. May we so live our lives that others may see in us his kindness and compassion. This we ask through the same Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

1 Corinthians 1:3–9
Psalm 85:8, 9, 10
Mark 13:33–37

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a green cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a symbol of royalty, such as a paper crowns (If you wish, the crown can be specially made for a statue or picture of Jesus that you also include in the setting.)

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Jesus Is Coming" (Seeds CD-1, Track #7) or **"The Promise," Part 1** (Promise & Good News CD-1, Track #1)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)



Jesus Says Be Ready

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

Our LORD and our God, you are like the sun and also like a shield. You treat us with kindness and with honor, never denying any good thing to those who live right. (PSALM 84:11)

Scripture Background

The reason today's readings were chosen for the First Sunday of Advent is made clear in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which says that "by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming [during Advent], the faithful renew their ardent desire for his Second Coming" (524).

In his First Letter to Corinthians, the Greek word Saint Paul uses to describe the Second Coming is *parousia*. In the days of the Roman Empire, this word designated the joyous occasion of a visit by the emperor, who was greeted on the streets by throngs of loyal admirers. (Today we see a similar outpouring of affection whenever one of the British royals visits almost any part of the English-speaking world.)

Paul writes the passage found in today's First Reading out of a hope common among first-century Christians, that Christ's Second Coming will happen in their lifetime. For any number of them, this hope might have become an expectation. If so, this wasn't the only instance in history when God's people were mistaken about a prophecy.

In the second century B.C., Jews familiar with a prediction found in Daniel, Chapter 7, believed that after Greek domination over them finally ended, the messiah would come and establish his glorious, never-ending reign. Instead, the Romans became their next conquerors.



In today's Gospel, Jesus sets the record straight. No one knows when the end times will come or when he will return to establish, once and for all, the worldwide reign of God. In fact, knowing the precise timing of these events doesn't even really matter. What does matter? We should live every hour of every day as if it is the hour of his return—and continue to do the necessary tasks of everyday life while keeping a watchful eye on the heavens.

CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

When Saint Thérèse of Lisieux was a small child, one night she looked at the star-studded sky and spotted a constellation that seemed to spell out the letter T, her first initial. Excited, she felt certain that God had communicated with her personally by sketching her initial upon the black velvet sky. And, indeed, God had—even if all little Thérèse really saw was the well-known configuration called the Southern Cross.

Finding signs of God's presence in their everyday world comes easily to many children (even those who aren't yet saints!). Sometimes all an adult needs to do for such children is stand back and allow free rein to the natural workings of their religious imagination.

For other children, a little encouragement is nec-

essary. You can help children grow in their awareness of God's presence when you share some of the signs of God's love that you have noticed in your life. Don't hesitate to reach back into your own childhood for examples. Sharon, an adult now in her 40s, fondly remembers the November birthdays of her Wisconsin childhood. Almost without fail, every year it snowed on her birthday. She began to see each new blanket of "birthday snow" as God's special birthday gift to her.

An alternate idea for the suggested homily would be to read and discuss with the children a few pages from the book *God's Paintbrush* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (© 1992 Jewish Lights Publishing). It was written to help children ages 3 to 10 to think about God and notice God's presence in the world around them.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children get ready for Jesus, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

More About ...

The Second Coming: Myths and Facts

While the early Christians might have been eager for the Second Coming, John L. McKenzie, S.J., warns that it would be a mistake to think they formed "a tight little eschatological group which was content to let the world go to perdition while it awaited the coming of its savior in the clouds." To think this way "seems to be as great a perversion of Jesus and the Church as anyone has ever proposed."

The first Christians continually worked to spread the Gospel ever more widely around them and to improve conditions for the poor and needy in their midst.

Moreover, much of the New Testament imagery associated with the Second Coming is just that—imagery—and should not be taken literally. People who expect Christ's return to be accompanied by great signs in the sky, earthquakes, and so forth are misreading biblical passages intended simply to convey the event's singular importance in human history.



Leaflet Activity

In this week's family activity families are invited to pay attention to the moment to help them prepare to welcome Jesus. The children's activity invites them to draw a picture of a way they can welcome Jesus each day.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

Have the children stand several feet away from the worship area, but facing it. Then show them the motions to go with the words they will sing as they step forward to the worship area. (If it is not possible to sing, simply chant the words while performing the actions.)

MOTIONS		WHILE SINGING...
1	Softly clapping your hands	"Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming,"
2	Take four steps forward	"Jesus is coming, light his way."
3	Take four steps to the left	"Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming,"
4	Take four steps backward	"Jesus is coming, light his way."
5	Hold up one finger for each number	"One, two, three, four. Four little candles to light his way."

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Let us quiet ourselves as we bow our heads and close our eyes to pray. To each prayer question that I ask, please respond, "Soon and very soon." Children of God, when will we see the coming |of the Lord?

CHILDREN: Soon and very soon.

LEADER: Children of God, when will we see the glory of God?

CHILDREN: Soon and very soon.

LEADER: Children of God, when will we see the goodness of the Lord?

CHILDREN: Soon and very soon.

LEADER: Yes, soon and very soon, the Lord Jesus will come to be our king. Loving God in Heaven, we want

to be ready for Jesus when he comes. We want to be awake and alert. Please show us how. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: In today's First Reading, Saint Paul is talking to some Christians he knew in an old Greek city named Corinth. But do you know what? He is also talking to us today, right now, in the American city [or town] of [Name]. Let's listen!

Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–9. Then say,
"The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you.

CHILDREN: Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 85:8, 9, 10.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: In today's First Reading, Saint Paul spoke about Christ's promise to his disciples that he would return to earth to rule in justice and peace. The disciples wanted to know when that would be. Listen

now to what Jesus said about that.
The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Matthew 13:33–37. Then say,
“The Gospel of the Lord.”

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Ask the children to be seated.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas
for your homily.

- When did Jesus say he would come again?
(He didn’t.)
- Jesus said there is something more important
than knowing the exact time of his return.
What is that? (Always being ready for him.)
- There is one more thing Jesus asks of us. He
says we should “be alert” while he is gone. This
means we should stay on the lookout for signs of
God’s love in our lives.
- Now let me tell you about some signs of God’s
love that I have noticed. (Share personal obser-
vations or memories of your own—sunny days
mirroring the warmth of God’s love, rainy days
suggesting the sorrows God sends to help us
grow, etc. If possible, use visuals to accompany
your examples, such as photos or actual objects.)
- Have you ever noticed signs of God’s love in your
life or in the world around you? (Call on volun-
teers to share responses.)

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith.
Respond to each question with the words, “I do.” Do
you believe in God, the Father, who is all-good and
all-wise?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only
Son, who freely picked up his Cross to save the world
from sin?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit,
who spoke through Jeremiah and all the other
prophets who suffered for the sake of God’s Word?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: All together now, as children of God wait-
ing for Jesus, let’s pray for all the people of the world
who need our prayers at this time. Please respond
“Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you.”

CHILDREN: “Give peace, O Lord, to those
who wait for you.”

LEADER: Give peace, O Lord, and wisdom
to the leaders of our Church, we pray.”

CHILDREN: “Give peace, O Lord, to those
who wait for you.”

LEADER: Give peace, O Lord, and joy to all
the families of our parish as they get ready for
Christmas, we pray.

CHILDREN: “Give peace, O Lord, to those
who wait for you.”

LEADER: Give peace, O Lord, and the gift of faith to
all the people of our [town/city/country], we pray.

CHILDREN: “Give peace, O Lord, to those
who wait for you.”

LEADER: Loving God, we know that when your
Son comes to us, he will be a king of kindness and
prince of peace! Show us signs of your love while
we wait for Jesus to come. This we ask through
Christ, our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of
the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the
assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven’t
already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the
children to take the leaflets home and share them
with their families. Encourage them to watch this
week’s Gospel Reflection video and complete the
Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Isaiah 40:3–5

Psalm 85:8–9, 10–11

Mark 1:1–8

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a violet cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a potted plant or vase of fresh flowers

Have ready for use during the Gathering activity:

Alongside the worship table, in the same far corner, place a statue or portrait of Christ. Then, using old newspapers, lay out a winding "pathway" between the Christ symbol and the place where the children will gather. Along the pathway, place an assortment of small obstacles, including anything that's fun and noisy, such as CDs, DVDs, video or arcade-like games, and toy musical instruments.

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"The Promise," Part 2 (Seeds CD-2, Track #3) or "The Promise," Part 2 (Promise & Good News CD-1 Track #2)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

**"Gospel Acclamation;
Alleluia" (Promise & Good
News CD-2, Track #24)**

Turn Back to God

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

Love and loyalty will come together;
goodness and peace will unite.
(PSALM 85:10)

Scripture Background

How did California's Death Valley get its name? On Dec. 25, 1849, a group of settlers entered the valley—but only 18 of the original 30 travelers made it out alive. Those 18 were on foot, having destroyed their oxen for food and their wagons for fuel. As they left behind the place that had nearly killed them, "Goodbye, Death Valley," they cried.

Equally harsh desert country figures prominently in today's Scripture readings. Isaiah tells Jewish exiles to clear a path home through the desert. Curiously, the usual route from Babylonia to Judah did not go through the perilous Arabian desert. Caravans went northwest along green river valleys, then from Syria headed south into Judah, thus circling around the desert.

Isaiah, however, describes a harsh desert route because he wants his people to know that God again will protect and guide them on their homeward journey, just as God had done during the Exodus from Egypt 700 years earlier.

For the Jews, the desert symbolized the perfect meeting place between God and humankind. There, free from the comforts and distractions of civilization, people learned complete dependence on God. God's presence became as near and real to them as a cloud by day and a fire by night.

Today's Gospel builds on this ancient symbolism, for the one who preaches repentance is a man of the desert. From that first-century



Judean wilderness, the Baptist's cry echoes down to us today: "Turn back to God" (Mark 1:4). We, too, must set aside distractions, enter the desert of our own hearts, and prepare for the coming of Christ.

CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

Sister Caroline, a Catholic grade-school teacher in Wisconsin, used to love visiting the Milwaukee County Zoo. "It's just such a wonderful display of God's creativity," she'd say. "Each animal is unique; each one, a different reflection of the divine Spirit!" The zoo would cause her to break into prayers of praise as readily as a magnificent European cathedral might have done for someone else.

Today's liturgy encourages children to think about prayer in ways old and new. Even at an early age, they can begin to take responsibility for their prayer lives, just as they learn good habits concerning personal hygiene and proper care of pets. But prayer can be fun, too!

The Homily offers several different prayer suggestions for children to try at home. Quite possibly, some of the children already know memorized prayers and use them regularly at meals and at bedtime. This is a worthy practice to be encouraged. But other kinds of prayer can be encouraged, too.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that prayer comes in two forms, vocalized and interior, and "the need to involve the senses in interior prayer corresponds to a requirement of our human nature" (2702).

While true for persons of all ages, nothing could be truer for children. The more their senses can be involved in prayer, the more their hearts will be involved. That is why the Homily's prayer-suggestions incorporate elements of sight, sound, and movement. Don't forget that with children's prayer, there's always room for creativity and adventure, too!



More About ...

Jesus Christ, Son of God

In the centuries before Mark wrote his Gospel, both Jews and Gentiles had assigned a variety of meanings to the term "Son of God." For the Jews, a Son of God could be an angel, God's Chosen People taken together as a whole, or any worthy individual among God's Chosen People, such as King David. For the Greeks and Romans, a son of God might be a demigod such as Hercules, a great mortal hero such as Odysseus, a king, or a priest.

First-century Christians, however, meant something entirely new and different when they called Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God. For them, Jesus was someone fully possessed by the Holy Spirit and sent by the Father to mirror God to the world. Alone among all beings in Heaven and on earth, Jesus enjoyed an "intimate and exclusive union with the Father" (John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1995, p. 831).

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about John the Baptist's message, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork, and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

Leaflet Activity

This week families make and traverse an obstacle course and reflect on obstacles that get between them and Jesus. The children are invited to complete a decoding activity to discover John the Baptist's message.



T U R N B A C K T O
 GOD A N D B E
 B A P T I Z E D !

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

The Opening Prayer will be said around the statue/picture in the corner, but first the children will walk single-file down the newspaper pathway to get there.

You be first in line; let the last person be another adult or an older child carrying a bag that can hold all the objects strewn on the pathway. Every time you come to an obstacle, stop, pick it up, ask the children what it is, then pass it down the line to the last person, who puts it in the bag. Between stops, sing a simple and fitting Advent song, or join together in a chant: "One, two, three, four! Prepare the way of the Lord!"

Opening Prayer

LEADER: As we gather around the Christ symbol, let us bow our heads to pray. Lord Jesus, we are your friends and followers, but sometimes we forget all about you. We fill up our lives with noise and toys, and we clutter the pathway to our hearts. We are sorry, Jesus, and we promise to do better. We promise to prepare the way of the Lord!

CHILDREN: Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: In today's First Reading, a holy man named Isaiah tells his people that God wants to come visit them, but there is a problem. God has no road! So listen to what Isaiah tells the people to do.

Read Isaiah 40:3–5. Then say,
 "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

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

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

LEADER: Read Psalm 85:8–9, 10–11.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: Today's Gospel is about Saint John the Baptist, whose job was to get people ready for the coming of Jesus. He did this by baptizing them in a river out in the desert. In those days, people received Baptism to show that they were sorry for their sins. The water symbolized the fresh, clean, new lives they wanted to live. As we listen to the Gospel, let's pretend we are all those people gathered together with John. Feel the sunshine on your face, hear the splashing in the river, look at John, listen to God's Word. The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Mark.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Mark 1:1–8. Then say,
“The Gospel of the Lord.”

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your homily.

- All the people who came to John had one thing in common. What was it? (sorrow for their sins)
- People sin whenever they turn away from God, forgetting all about God and the things God wants them to do. One of those things is to take time every day for prayer.
- What are some ways children like you can pray? (Possible responses include the following.)
 - » Say memorized meal prayers, morning prayers, bedtime prayers.
 - » Read children’s Bible stories or look at Bible picture books; talk to God about them.
 - » Write letters to God or draw pictures for God.
 - » Make up your own songs for God and sing them.
 - » Talk to God while taking a walk, riding your bike, swinging on a swing.
- Which idea do you like best? Do you have any other ideas?

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, “Yes, I do.” Do you believe in God the Father, who sends his Son to show you his glory?

CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God the Son, our Lord, Jesus, for whom you need to prepare the way?

CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, given to you at the time of your Baptism?

CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in the holy Catholic Church, the gathering place of all the baptized?

CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: Because we are the Church, we are the gathering of the baptized, so let us turn to God in prayer. Our response will be, “Lord, hear our prayer.” Jesus, come to the leaders of our Church, and fill them with your love and wisdom, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Lord, hear our prayer.

LEADER: Jesus, come into every home of every family in our parish, and fill it with your light and peace, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Lord, hear our prayer.

LEADER: Jesus, come to our town, and fill it with your goodness and beauty, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Lord, hear our prayer.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

God our Father, we know that when your Son comes again in glory, he will bring us every good gift. Help us, God, to clear a straight path for him. We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven’t already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week’s Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Isaiah 61:1–2
 Luke 1:47 and 49, 53–54
 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24
 John 1:19–28

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a rose cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a statue of Jesus illuminated with a flashlight in front of it.

The statue may be an adult Jesus or a baby Jesus from a Nativity set. If possible, darken the room to make the light on the statue more visible. Finally, put the entire display in an open area, to accommodate the Gathering activity.

Review the words and actions of the Gathering activity on page 20. If desired, make cue cards for the refrain of "Christ, Be Our Light," which will be sung for the Gathering activity and again during the Prayer of the Faithful. Make large cue cards with each line of the refrain or simple pictures of key words: Christ, light, hearts, darkness, church.

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Christ, Be Our Light" by Bernadette Farrell. <https://youtu.be/KMkfKXLcm5Q>

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)

Get Ready for the Lord!

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

Then in a loud voice she [Elizabeth] said to Mary: "God has blessed you more than any other woman! He has also blessed the child you will have."
 (LUKE 1:42)

Scripture Background

The reading from Isaiah is especially appropriate for Advent because, according to Luke 4:16–21, these were the words of Scripture that Jesus used to open his public life of preaching and healing.

Advent is a time for recalling not only the beginning of Christ's life but also the roots of Christianity. As Jesus' followers, we all share in his mission to show God's own kindness to the unaware, the unwell, and the unfree.

The Second Reading, from 1 Thessalonians, elaborates on a few of the required attitudes and behaviors for Christians. Note that Saint Paul mentions first maintaining a joyful spirit. To what extent is the scarcity of ordinary good manners in today's world related to an absence of joy? It's a question to ponder.

Finally, we find in the Gospel a portrait of a consummate Christian, although, strictly speaking, Saint John the Baptist died too soon to become a member of the Christian movement. Nonetheless, he became an example to Christians of all generations with his relentless insistence that attention on him was misplaced. All eyes, rather, belonged on Jesus.

Can we escape our own self-absorption long enough to learn John's secret of joy? JOY has been described as putting three priorities in their proper order: Jesus, first; Others, second; and Yourself last. It's a good prescription for living a healthy spiritual life.



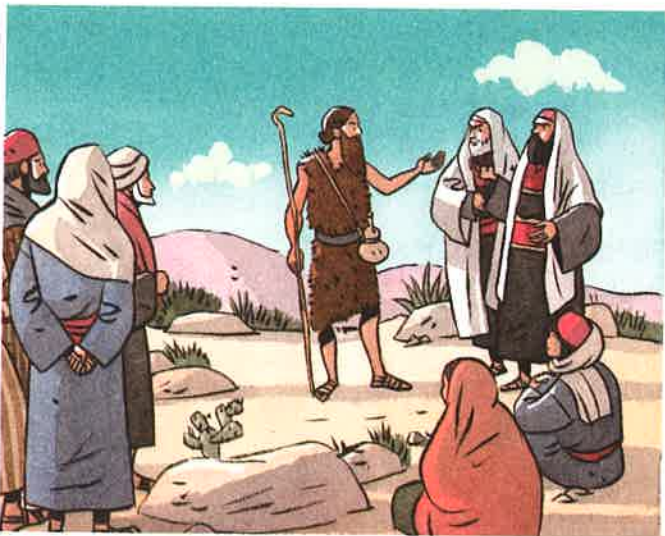
CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

In today's liturgy, children are urged to "enlighten someone" with the love and light of Christ. Those who regularly attend church services often hear about the importance of loving their neighbors. What might get missed, however, is the simple idea that loving one's neighbors begins with showing them ordinary common courtesy.

People say that common courtesy is not so common anymore. According to a study released by Common Agenda, 8 in 10 Americans believe that impolite behavior has become a serious social problem. One of the bad behaviors named in the survey—using vulgar language in public—bothered 56 percent of those who responded. Unfortunately, this is one habit even children can develop.

Which bad behaviors among children have you noticed? Those are the ones you should address in your homily, even if you throw out some or all of the suggested questions to make room for your own.

One group of catechists, for example, noticed that children attending Mass in their parish did not give their neighbors warm and friendly greetings during the Sign of Peace. The children offered limp hands, avoided eye contact, greeted only the people they knew, or even remained frozen in place without greeting anyone at all. The situation markedly improved after the subject was addressed in all parish religious education classes.



More About ...

Those Puzzling Prophecies

When John denies being the Messiah in today's Gospel, the prophecy on everyone's mind probably is Daniel 9:25. It promises "the coming of the Chosen Leader" sometime after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which Babylon had destroyed.

When John denies being Elijah, he disassociates himself from another biblical prophecy, Malachi 3:1. It maintains that a messenger like Elijah will come to Jerusalem ahead of the Messiah to announce his arrival, but John was too humble to think of himself as one like Elijah.

Finally, when John says he is not the Prophet, he disavows any connection to a person described in Deuteronomy 18:18: "So when I want to speak to them, I will choose one of them to be a prophet like you. I will give my message to that prophet, who will tell the people exactly what I have said."

In bringing up, instead, the words of Isaiah 40:3, the humble John describes how he best sees himself—simply as a voice crying out in the wilderness.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about Jesus as the Light of the World, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.



Leaflet Activity

Sharing stories of seeing Jesus' light in others is the focus this week for the family. An activity for the children helps them identify and color candles on an Advent wreath.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

With the children, join hands and form a circle around the display you have prepared. Sing the refrain of "Christ, Be Our Light" once or twice, using cue cards if you wish. Then, ask the group to join with you as you put the song and motions together as follows:

- While singing the first "Christ, be our light," the circle slowly walks clockwise around the Christ statue.
- During the words, "Shine in our hearts," the circle moves inward toward Christ, as if to catch some rays of his light.
- During the words, "Shine through the darkness," the circle moves outward again, symbolizing the light of Christ reaching into surrounding darkness.
- During the second "Christ, be our light," the circle resumes clockwise motion around the statue.
- Then during the final phrase, "Shine in your Church gathered today," the circle stops moving as clasped hands are raised high overhead in a gesture of praise.

Opening Prayer

(Remain in the circle formation.)

LEADER: During our Opening Prayer, each time I pray, "Shine in our hearts, Lord," please respond, "Christ, be our light." When we are home with our families, shine in our hearts, Lord.

CHILDREN: Christ, be our light.

LEADER: When we are away from home, spending time with friends and neighbors, shine in our hearts, Lord.

CHILDREN: Christ, be our light.

LEADER: Wherever we go and whatever we do, shine in our hearts, Lord.

CHILDREN: Christ, be our light.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: When God shines in our hearts, the Spirit of God takes control and gives us a special mission! This very thing once happened to a man named Isaiah. Listen.

Read Isaiah 61:1–2. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: My soul rejoices in my God.

CHILDREN: My soul rejoices in my God.

LEADER: *Read Luke 1:47 and 49, 53–54.*

Second Reading

LEADER: When Christ shines in our hearts, there are certain things we do and certain things we don't do. Let's listen as Saint Paul tells us some of these dos and don'ts.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: All John the Baptist wanted to do was let everyone know about Jesus—the light of the world—but people just wanted to know who John was. Listen to how he handled this unwanted attention. The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of John.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read John 1:19–28. Then say, “The Gospel of the Lord.”*

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your homily.

- John didn’t want people to notice him or to think he was great, but to know Jesus and see that Jesus was great.
- Every Christian has the same mission that John had, making the goodness of Jesus known to the world. There’s a very simple way to do this: in your everyday life, always show courtesy to others. Courtesy is just another word for kindness.
- Here are some questions to ask yourself. (For greater impact, act out bad behavior connected with each situation, then ask a child volunteer to act out good behavior in the same situation.)
 - » Do you always say “please” when you ask for something?
 - » Do you always say “thank you” when you receive something? (This includes writing thank-you notes to those you can’t thank in person.)
- When you are kind to others, you let the light of Christ shine in your heart—and out into the world!

End by removing the flashlight from the display. Take the flashlight apart, and show that the bulb is like the light of Christ and the lens is like the person who practices courtesy. What if the lens were muddy with selfishness instead of transparent with kindness?

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, “I do.” Do you believe in God, our Creator, whose loving kindness shines on all that is made?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus, our Lord, who has lived among us as our light and our life?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, who enlightens our hearts with the love of Christ?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in the holy, catholic Church, called to share the light of Christ with all the world?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

Explain to the children that the Prayer of the Faithful today will be special, but first allow a minute for all to think of those for whom they want to pray. Then explain that you will pass the lit flashlight from person to person.

While holding the flashlight, each child will name someone on whom he or she wants the light of Christ to shine. After each petition, everyone respond in song, “Christ, be our light.” You will begin the petitions by praying for the leaders of the Church while holding the flashlight.

LEADER: On the leaders of our church, shine your light, O Lord.

CHILDREN: Christ, be our light.

After the last petition, sing the entire refrain of “Christ, Be Our Light.”

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven’t already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week’s Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Romans 16:25–27

Psalm 47:1–2, 7–8

Luke 1:26–38

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a violet cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ an assortment of ordinary objects that can represent various occupations: a hammer, a cooking spoon, red pen or pencil, and so forth.

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Mary, Our Mother" (*Seeds CD-2, Track #23*) or **"Mary, O Blessed One"** (*Promise & Good News CD-1, Track #3*)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (*Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24*)



Nothing Is Impossible with God

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

*With all my heart I praise the Lord,
and I am glad because of God
my Savior. (LUKE 1:46)*

Scripture Background

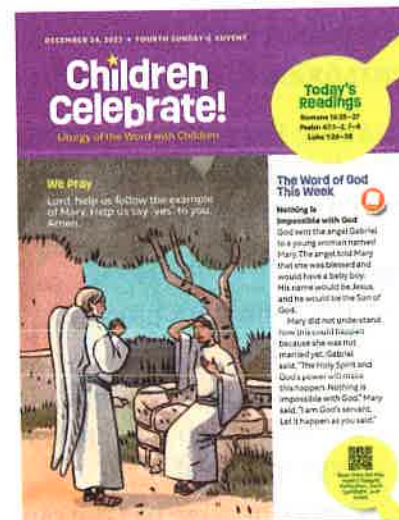
The Romans whom Saint Paul addresses in the First Reading are Christians who have returned to Rome some five years after having been expelled by Emperor Claudius. Due to complex, intersecting religious and political circumstances, several parts of the world weren't exactly safe for Christians in Paul's time. The Gospel, however, kept believers strong in the face of trials.

Leaping ahead to 2002, Christian missionary Gracia Burnham told reporters that the Gospel had kept her strong during a yearlong hostage ordeal in the Philippine jungle. Denied a Bible, she and her husband relied on memory to recall comforting Bible passages from time to time and to sing, alphabetically, every hymn they could remember from the hymnals used in their church back home.

Today's Gospel introduces the first woman ever to have experienced the strengthening power of the Christian message. Her name wasn't Gracia, but coincidentally, she was "full of grace."

In ancient Greek, the word grace implied a combination of joy and wisdom. Mary was a woman of profound inner joy, the result of living in constant awareness of God's presence in her life and in the life of her people. Acting with wisdom—which, to the Jews, meant acting in harmony with God's will—came as second nature to her.

Thus, when Mary agreed to her "unplanned parenthood," she wasn't coming up with a sudden new self-description. Rather, she simply stated how she habitually saw herself: as God's servant.



CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

Years ago in a little house outside a small town, two young children enjoyed playing “master and servant” with their mother’s collection of bells. While the “master” lounged on a couch, the “servant” came running each time the master rang a bell to issue a command: “Get me a glass of water,” “Turn on the TV,” and so on. The children took turns being the servant, but usually their game abruptly ended whenever the master, becoming tyrannical, issued an unreasonable command: “Clean the whole house before Mom gets home from work.”

It is often said that children are naturally egotistical and self-centered, but with few exceptions, aren’t we all? Jesus seems to have understood that when he said, “If you want the place of honor, you must become a slave and serve others!” (Mark 9:35) He knew he’d have to appeal to our egos, our wish for greatness, in order to get us to do the right thing.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” is perhaps the perennial question that adults ask children. Doubtless, no child ever replies, “A servant.”

As far as most of us are concerned, servanthood is nothing to strive for. In today’s liturgy, through the Gathering activity and its companion homily, you will use a teaching trick that Jesus used in his parables. You will turn a preconception on its head, first startling your young listeners, then giving them a point to ponder: servanthood is a state to strive for—as long as you choose God as your master.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children’s Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about saying “yes” to God, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week’s Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

BONUS LESSON: Go to <https://www.pflaum.com/liturgy-of-the-word/bonus-resources/> to download and share the Children Celebrate lesson and leaflet for Christmas Day.



More About ...

Luke and the Holy Spirit

References to the Holy Spirit appear frequently in Luke’s writings. Important to remember, however, is that no New Testament writer yet possessed a fully developed theology of the Trinity. All four evangelists therefore understood the Spirit mostly in Old Testament terms.

For the Jews, God alone was the Holy One. Things and persons that belonged to God were holy only indirectly— because God had breathed his own holiness into them. The Spirit was viewed as a projection of God’s own essence into the world God had created.

The holy Spirit (with the word “holy” always rendered in the lower case) was the breath of God becoming the life principle in all things living. Whenever and wherever God withdrew his breath, life ended. More than a life principle, however, the Spirit also was an agent of divine action in the world. Whenever and wherever the Spirit moved, God’s saving power manifested in creative new ways.



Leaflet Activity

Saying a family Rosary is the ideal activity this week as we hear the story of the Annunciation in Luke's Gospel. The children complete a word search activity to review important names and words in the Gospel.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

After finishing the Gathering song, tell the children that the objects on the table represent all different kinds of work that adults do. Then hold up each object and ask the children to name the kind of worker who uses that object—hammer (carpenter); wooden spoon (chef); chalk (teacher), and so forth. Conclude with these questions:

- Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? (Allow time for children to share.)
- How about being a servant when you grow up? Would you like that? Why or why not?

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Now let us bow our heads for prayer. Please repeat each line after me. You have looked into my heart, Lord.

CHILDREN: You have looked into my heart, Lord.

LEADER: You know all about me.

CHILDREN: You know all about me.

LEADER: So don't let me follow evil ways, Lord.

CHILDREN: So don't let me follow evil ways, Lord.

LEADER: But lead me in the ways that are good and true. Amen.

CHILDREN: But lead me in the ways that are good and true. Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: If we want to live good lives and do good work when we grow up, we need to be strong in heart and soul. In today's First Reading, Saint Paul tells us what can make us strong.

Read Romans 16:25–27. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: God is King of all the earth!

CHILDREN: God is King of all the earth!

LEADER: *Read Psalm 47:1–2, 7–8.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: We have just learned what makes us strong in heart and soul—the Good News about Jesus Christ. Can you name the very first person to hear that Good News? Hint: the blessed person was a woman. Listen now to her story.

LEADER: The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Luke.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read Luke 1:26–38. Then say, "The Gospel of the Lord."*

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your homily.

- Mary first learned the good news about Jesus Christ from an angel. She learned that God wanted her to be Jesus' mother.
 - » Before she could say yes or no, the angel described what Jesus would be like. (Reread to the children Verses 32–33.)
 - » Now this all sounded fine and good, but Mary had a question: "How can this happen? I am not married!"
 - » What was the angel's answer? (Jesus will be born by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Nothing is impossible for God.")
- According to the angel, what other impossible thing had God already done? Hint: It was done for Mary's cousin Elizabeth. (God was giving Elizabeth a son, too, even though she was very old.)
- Do you know who Elizabeth's son grew up to be? Hint: We have been talking about him all during Advent. (Saint John the Baptist.)
- In the end, Mary said "yes" to God; she said, "I am the Lord's servant!"
 - » Now think back to what you said earlier about growing up to be a servant.
 - » Do you see that it's not a bad thing to be a servant—if you are God's servant?
- Mary proves an old saying, "God will not be outdone in generosity."
 - » It means that no matter how much you try to give God, God will always give back even more in return.
 - » Mary agreed to be God's servant, but in the end she was made queen of Heaven and earth.

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand and respond to each statement with, "This, I do believe." God is a loving Creator with a plan to save the world through Jesus. This, I do believe.

CHILDREN: This, I do believe.

LEADER: Jesus is the Son of God Most High and the Son of Mary. This, I do believe

CHILDREN: This, I do believe.

LEADER: By the power of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus was born of Mary. This, I do believe.

CHILDREN: This, I do believe.

LEADER: As the mother of Jesus, Mary is also the mother of the holy, catholic Church. This, I do believe.

CHILDREN: This, I do believe.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: Today in the Gospel we learned that if we become servants of God, we can do great things with our lives, just as Mary did with hers. So let us stand before God, ready to do all that God asks of us, and let us pray. Please respond to each petition with "Nothing is impossible for God." For the leaders of the Church, that they will be true servants of God, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Nothing is impossible for God.

LEADER: For the people of our parish, that they will stay strong in the good news of Jesus Christ, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Nothing is impossible for God.

LEADER: For all people on earth, that God's joyful message will reach them wherever they are, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Nothing is impossible for God.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Grant, we ask you, O Lord God, that we your servants may be blessed with continual health of soul and body, and that, through the prayers of the Blessed Mary ever virgin, we may be safe from present sorrows, and be brought to eternal joys, through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Sirach 3:2–6

Psalm 128:1–2, 3, 4–5

Colossians 3:12–17

Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a white cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a Christmas card showing the Holy Family, or use a Nativity set with figurines of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.
- ☐ hang the signs you have prepared for the homily.

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Away in a Manager" (Seeds CD-1, Track #8) or "The Holy Family" (Promise & Good News CD-1, Track #10)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)



Listen to God

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

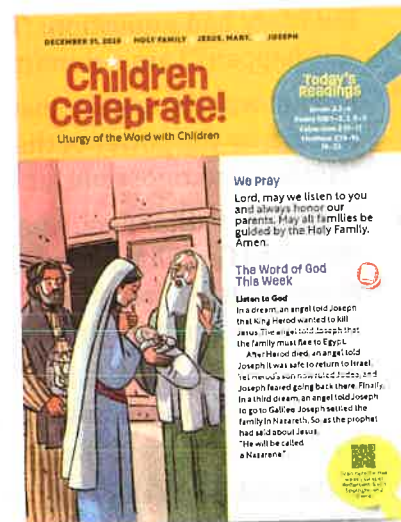
The LORD will bless you if you respect him and obey his laws. Your fields will produce, and you will be happy and all will go well. (PSALM 128:1–2)

Scripture Background

To live the good life, live a good life. That is to say, if you want health, a long life, and material blessings, obey God's commandments, and God will reward you. That is the central tenet of the Bible's wisdom literature. Today's passage from Sirach focuses on the rewards of obeying the Fourth Commandment. While Sirach's promises seem overblown—for at times good people do fall into poverty, suffer illness, die young—there remains a general truthfulness to what he says. Modern medicine has found that chronically angry people are less healthy and live shorter lives than people with gentler, more yielding spirits. Applying this finding to the Fourth Commandment, we can see, then, that people who don't hold bitter, lifelong grudges against imperfect parents are likely to live better and longer.

The reading from Colossians elaborates on the behavior expected of Christians in all settings. In choosing this reading for today's feast, however, the Church is recommending that these rules of conduct especially be followed in homes, among family members.

The all-time best model of family life, according to Catholic tradition, can be found in the Holy Family. In today's Gospel, we see in action the secret of their success: a listening attitude consistently maintained with God and with each other. Joseph paid serious attention to his dreams, which seemed to be God's favorite way of speaking with him, and Mary



paid serious attention to Joseph each time he began a conversation with, "Last night, I had the strangest dream"

CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

First, let's have a word about today's unusual approach to reading the Gospel, which takes place in three different lands. With older children, you can use maps to give a sense of different geographic locations and distances between them. With younger children incapable of abstract thinking, however, it is better to provide a simulation activity, such as the "Bible walk" suggested for today's Gospel.

Prepare three signs and post them on the walls of the room where the group meets. On one sign write "Judea" and draw the Christmas star. On another, write "Egypt" and draw a pyramid in the desert. On still another, write "Galilee" and draw a hammer and saw to represent Joseph's shop. (If you check a map, you will see that Galilee is north of Judea, and Egypt is southwest of Judea.) When you are ready to begin reading the Gospel to the children, follow these instructions:

- Under the Judea sign, read Verses 13–15.
- Under the Egypt sign, read Verses 19–21.
- Then head back toward Judea, but stop halfway and read Verse 22.
- Change course and go to Galilee, then read Verse 23.

Now let's talk about the "Famous Families" game and its connection with the homily. An ulterior motive for playing this game is getting the children to talk about families they've seen on TV and in the movies. Do not hesitate to criticize any shows that, in your opinion, glamorize bad behavior in families or offer children poor role models. Conversely, praise the shows that provide positive images. Child advocate James Steyer says that it is important for adults to share with children why they like or don't like certain TV shows. He guarantees that, after having heard from trusted adults, children will never again view those shows in

More About ...

The Fourth Commandment

The section of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that discusses the Fourth Commandment is packed with useful and striking insights into the nature of the Christian family. Here are a few of them:

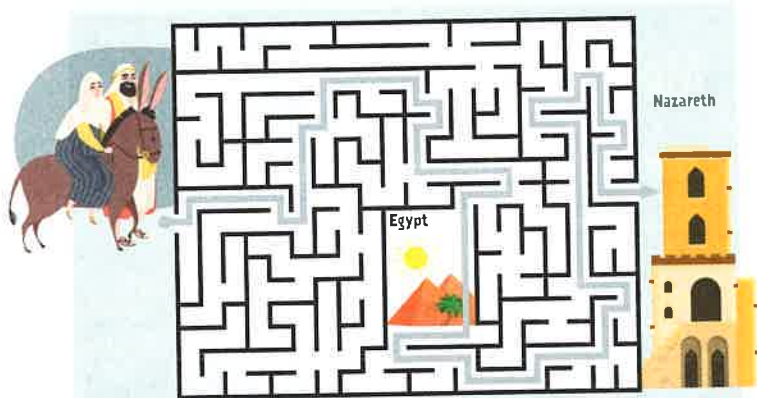
- "God has willed that, after him, we should honor our parents to whom we owe life and who have handed on to us the knowledge of God" (#2197).
- In a broader sense, the Fourth Commandment applies to the honor owed to one's ancestors and descendants, entire extended family, teachers and students, employers and employees, governing officials and constituents (#2199).
- "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church" (#2204).
- "The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit" (#2205).

quite the same way—even if they continue watching them.

CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about the importance of family, through a summary of the Scripture story, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.



Leaflet Activity

Getting everyone ready to move forward in faith during the new year is the focus of this week's family activity. The children's activity is a maze.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

After finishing the Gathering song, tell the group that you are going to play a game called "Famous Families." Standing in a circle, children will take turns calling out the names of famous families. These can be real families or families from books, TV, and movies. Anyone who can't name a famous family or who repeats a name must go inside the circle and sit down. The game ends when there are more persons inside the circle than there are persons standing around them.

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Ask everyone to be seated and bow their heads for the Opening Prayer.

Loving God, families come in all shapes and sizes. While no two families are alike, all are called to holiness. In our own families, help us to live together in joy and peace. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: Does anyone know what the Fourth Commandment is? (See if someone knows.) The Fourth Commandment is, "Honor your father and mother." In today's First Reading, we learn what happens to people who keep this commandment. Read Sirach 3:2-6. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Happy are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

CHILDREN: Happy are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

LEADER: Read Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5.

Second Reading

LEADER: We heard how God rewards those who honor their parents. In this reading, Saint Paul advises us on how to act toward everyone in our families.

Read Colossians 3:12-17. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: Today's Gospel story takes place in three different lands: Judea, Egypt, and Galilee. See the signs posted in this room? Judea was where Jesus was born under a bright star. Where is that sign? Egypt was the land of pyramids, where Jesus spent time as a baby. Where is that sign? Galilee was the land where Jesus grew up and where Joseph had his carpenter's shop. Where is that sign?

Because Jesus' family moved around a lot, we are going to do something a little different for the Gospel today. We will pretend we are going with the Holy

Family everywhere they go. So let's all gather under the sign for Judea. Where our story begins.

The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23. Then say, "The Gospel of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your homily.

- The Holy Family always listened to God and to one another.
 1. In today's Gospel, how did Joseph and Mary listen to God? (They obeyed God's warnings about Herod.)
 2. How did they listen to each other? (Mary listened to Joseph tell about his dreams, which contained God's warnings.)
- Now let's talk about some of the families we named earlier in our "Famous Families" game.
 1. Which famous family most resembles the Holy Family? Why?
 2. Which famous family least resembles the Holy Family? Why?

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Ask the children to stand and respond to each statement with, "This I do believe." God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are a divine community of love. This I do believe.

CHILDREN: This I do believe.

LEADER: The family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph shows us family life at its best. This I do believe.

CHILDREN: This I do believe.

LEADER: The holy, catholic Church brings together all children of God into one family of love. This I do believe.

CHILDREN: This I do believe.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: Just as God loved and protected the Holy Family, God also cares for our families. So let us ask our loving God for all that we need to stay safe and happy. Our response to each petition will be, "Hear us, O Lord." For the Holy Father and all bishops and priests, that they will care for the Church the way Saint Joseph cared for his family, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: For all the families of our parish, that they will grow together in love and move forward in faith, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: For all the families of our (town, city, county) and nation, that they will be safe from harm and free from danger, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Hear us, O Lord.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Let us pray. Today we will close with a very old prayer for protection. Usually it is said in the evening before sleep, but since we won't be together this evening, we'll pray it now. Please repeat after me.

LEADER: Protect us, O Lord, while we are awake and while we sleep.

CHILDREN: Protect us, O Lord, while we are awake and while we sleep.

LEADER: That we may keep watch with Christ and rest in peace.

CHILDREN: That we may keep watch with Christ and rest in peace.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Isaiah 60:1–6

Psalm 72:1, 2, 10abc,
10de–11

Matthew 2:1–12

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a white cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a statue or a doll representing the infant Jesus.

Have ready for use during the

Gathering activity:

- ☐ A recording of the carol "Christmas Star"
- ☐ a large paper star or a star-shaped Christmas ornament
- ☐ three children willing to represent the kings, each to carry one of the gifts in procession;
- ☐ three small wrapped boxes to represent the three gifts of the Magi.

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Christmas Star" (Promise & Good News CD-1, Track #12)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)

Guide Us to Jesus

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

*Let the king be fair with everyone,
and let there be peace
until the moon falls from the sky.
(PSALM 72:7)*

Scripture Background

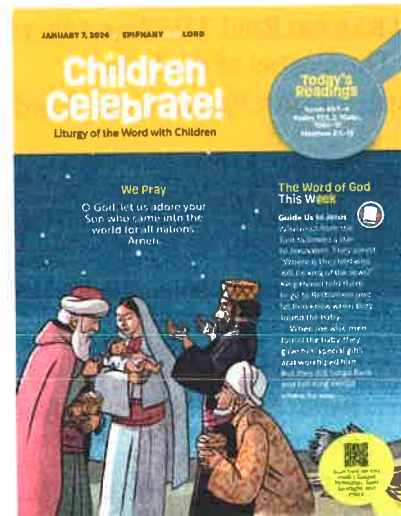
To celebrate the Epiphany, the Church specifically chose today's reading from Isaiah for its theme of universal salvation. These verses were written after the Jews had returned to their homeland following 70 years of exile in Babylon.

It was good to be home again, but life was in many ways a bigger struggle than ever. The people had to raise up a new temple from the ashes of the old, rediscover the forgotten rudiments of their faith, address sticky political problems caused by their return, and rebuild their national economy. Doubtless they wondered, "Is this all there is—just one national crisis after another?"

Then along came Isaiah's prophecies of the glorious future to be realized in messianic times. Included was a vision of a new and different kind of relationship with foreigners. No longer would they simply be enemies that Israel had to conquer or resist or avenging instruments in God's hands used to chastise the nation for its betrayals of the covenant.

Rather, foreigners would become equal partners with Jews in God's saving plan. Flocking to Jerusalem with their gifts and their sacrifices, they would come to recognize and to honor the one true God of Israel.

Today's Gospel shows the beginning of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The three foreigners, bearing gifts for the newborn king, foreshadow the people of all races and nations who one day will flock to



Jesus. In the greatest show on earth—God’s magnificent display of love for all humankind—Jesus really is the star.

CHILDREN’S CONNECTIONS

Today’s Gospel is filled with fascinating elements of danger, intrigue, and divine intervention. Because it’s a story worth repeating—and complicated enough to be a bit confusing for the very young—it is suggested that you reread it during the homily. Children enjoy hearing their favorite tales over and over again, especially if they are well-told. These suggestions can improve the way you read Bible stories to children:

1. Avoid the most common mistake:
reading too fast without taking a breath!
S-l-o-w d-o-w-n so that your listeners won’t miss a single detail of the story.
2. Vary the volume (loud, soft), pitch (high, low) and rate (fast, slow) of your voice to match each dramatic situation as it unfolds.
3. Pause whenever you want to create a brief moment of suspense. For example, after the word “worried” in Verse 3.
4. Use a different voice for each character that speaks. For example, a calm, gentle voice for the wise man in Verse 2; a low, rough voice for Herod in Verses 4 and 8; a high-pitched, frightened voice for the priests in Verses 5–6.
5. Let your facial expressions reveal character, too. Scowl when you read Herod’s words, go “bug-eyed” when the frightened priests speak, etc.
6. Practice reading the piece aloud until your interpretation feels natural.

Of course, another option is to invite someone else to reread the story. Any high school speech or drama student might enjoy the opportunity and appreciate being asked. (But be sure to pass along the above suggestions when you make your request.)

CHILDREN’S LEAFLET

The Children’s Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about finding God, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week’s Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

More About ...

Jews, Gentiles, and Matthew

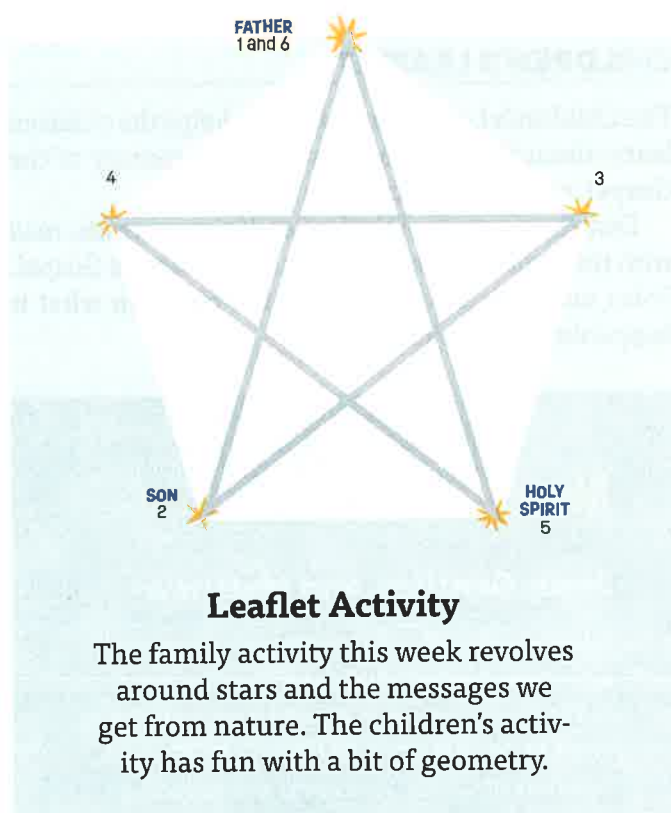
Unlike Luke, whose Gospel was aimed at a Gentile audience, Matthew wrote for his fellow Jews. He wanted to help them see the connections between the life and mission of Christ Jesus and the teachings of their Jewish faith tradition. Consider, for example, the way the following Old Testament passages find echoes in Matthew’s account of the Epiphany:

“Someday, a king of Israel will appear like a star.” (Numbers 24:17).

“The people of Sheba will bring gold and spices in praise of me, the Lord.” (Isaiah 60:6)

“Long live the king! Give him gold from Sheba.” (Psalm 72:15)

Sheba was an ancient term for modern-day Yemen. Beginning in the tenth century b.c., it achieved importance as a trade center for its midway location between Arabian lands to the east and Jewish and Syrian lands to the west.



Leaflet Activity

The family activity this week revolves around stars and the messages we get from nature. The children's activity has fun with a bit of geometry.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

Explain that today is the feast of the three kings who visited the newborn baby Jesus. You will begin the service with a small procession to commemorate their journey from a faraway land to the place where Jesus was born. As the children sing "Christmas Star," lead them in procession around the room while holding a star high above your head.

The three children acting as the Magi will follow you, carrying the three gifts, and the rest of the children will follow them. When you reach (or return to) the worship area, place the star somewhere near or above the infant Jesus, and have the three Magi lay their gifts at his feet.

Opening Prayer

LEADER: In ancient times, people fell on their knees in the presence of a king. Because the three kings knew that Jesus was a king greater than they, today let's kneel for our Opening Prayer. *(All kneel.)*
Lord Jesus, when you were born, wise men from the

East traveled hundreds of miles to see you in person and to bring you gifts fit for a king.

Invite the children to be seated if they have been standing. Turn the electric lights on again, light the candle in the worship area, and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: If you ever go on a trip to the Holy Land, one city you will be sure to visit is Jerusalem. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah predicted that, one day, Jerusalem would become a great and important city, attracting visitors from around the world. Let's listen to what Isaiah said.

Read Isaiah 60:1–6. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning the psalm, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

CHILDREN: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 72:1, 2, 10abc, 10de–11.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: Now we will hear the story of the three wise men who followed the star to Jesus' birthplace. On the way, they stopped in Jerusalem. Let's listen to their story.

The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read Matthew 2:1–12. Then say, "The Gospel of the Lord."*

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your Homily. (Some questions the children can answer, and some you may need to answer for them.)

- When the wise men realized that a new king of the Jews had been born, how did they feel? (happy, excited)
- When King Herod learned of it, how did he feel? (worried)
- Why would Herod have been worried? (He was afraid that Jesus would replace him as king. He cared more about himself than about his people.)
- Herod couldn't answer the wise men's question; do you remember what the question was? ("Where is the child born to be king of the Jews?")
- But who did Herod know would have the answer? (priests and teachers at the temple) Why did they know? (They studied the Bible and knew all the prophecies about the messiah.)
- What did Herod ask the wise men to do after they found Jesus? (He wanted them to come back to Jerusalem and tell him where they found Jesus.)
- Was Herod telling the truth when he said he wanted to worship Jesus, too? (No. He wanted to kill Jesus.)
- How did God protect Jesus from Herod? (God sent the wise men a warning in a dream, so they returned home without telling Herod anything.)

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, "I do."
Do you believe in God, our Father and Creator, who made the sun, the moon, and all the stars?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, whose birth was announced by a bright star?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, who leads us and guides us the way the star guided the wise men?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in the holy, catholic Church, which brings people to Christ from all around the world?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: Let us pray. Loving God, the greatest show on earth is the love you have shown us through Jesus your Son. Because you have loved us enough to send us Jesus, we are not afraid to ask you for all our needs. To each petition, please respond, "Show us your love, O Lord." For the leaders of the Church, that they will show us the way to Jesus, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Show us your love, O Lord.

LEADER: For the members of our parish, that they will always seek Jesus and follow after him, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Show us your love, O Lord.

LEADER: For the leaders of our town and country, that they will be like the three kings—wise and good, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Show us your love, O Lord.

LEADER: *Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:*

Holy God, many times you have shown us your love, and we know that you will show it many times more. For this we thank you, through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

1 Samuel 3:4–10, 19
Psalm 40:1 & 3ab, 8 & 11
John 1:35–42

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a green cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ optional: an illustration of Andrew the Apostle (available online by searching the phrase "Saint Andrew images").

Have ready for use during the Gathering activity:

- ☐ timing device (egg timer, wrist-watch or clock with a second hand or a cell phone with a timer)

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Saying Yes" (Seeds CD-2, Track #8) or **"Come and Follow Me"** (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #14)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)

Here I Am, Lord

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

You, LORD, never fail to have pity on me; your love and faithfulness always keep me secure. (PSALM 40:11)

Scripture Background

Young Samuel lived in a time before the Israelites were one unified nation under a single king. They were, instead, 12 loosely related tribes occupying the land to which Moses had led them some 200 years earlier.

The center of worship was not Jerusalem but Shiloh, where the long-suffering Eli and his corrupt sons served as priests.

To fulfill a vow made by his mother before his birth, Samuel had lived in the house of Eli from the age of three. Essentially, he had grown up in the Lord's service. (See 1 Samuel 1.)

The night he received his call to be a prophet of God and leader of the people, Samuel was sleeping in a place where the ark of the covenant was kept. The ark contained the stone tablets given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Scholars are not sure if, at this time, the Israelites worshiped in a temple or if they were still worshiping in a meeting tent.

The youth's night duty probably included guarding the ark and keeping a sanctuary light burning near it, as decreed by the law of Moses. (We observe a similar law today in our churches by keeping a lit sanctuary candle near the tabernacle that houses the Blessed Sacrament.)

The Gospel story about Andrew's call is fairly straight forward and needs little comment. Note, however, God's use of ordinary human interaction to gather disciples around our Lord. First, John the Baptist had told his disciple Andrew about Jesus, then Andrew told his brother Simon. Isn't that how most of us come to faith, through the trusted word of somebody we know?



CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

Year in and year out, one rule never changed at a girls' summer camp run by the Sisters of St. Agnes in the scenic Wisconsin woods: No radios. Their thinking was that for one week of the year, God deserved a chance to speak to the girls through the beauty of nature, without any outside competition.

For similar reasons, you are encouraged to tell children to build silence into their daily routines. Suggest that sometimes they go to their rooms, lie flat on their backs, breathe deeply, and silently repeat with the rhythm of their breathing the words of Samuel, "I'm listening, Lord. What do you want me to do?" Besides being a good way to pray, this can help an angry or upset child to calm down.

"Obey your elders" is childhood advice as old as the Fourth Commandment. Nevertheless, no child should obey an adult who wants him or her to do something wrong. You may wish to stress this point when discussing with children the voice of God in other people. If an adult ever says something that conflicts with what a child feels inside to be right, that child should always trust her or his own inner voice.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about hearing God's call in their lives, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

More About ...

Saint Andrew the First-Called

Because of an early tradition identifying Andrew as the first Apostle to become a follower of Jesus, Eastern Christians to this day honor him as "Saint Andrew the First-Called." According to another tradition that dates back to Eusebius, third-century bishop of Caesarea, Andrew's missionary travels took him as far as the shores of the Black Sea and along Russia's Dnieper River. From earliest times, therefore, Russian Christians have claimed Andrew as their nation's patron saint.

The type of crucifix adopted by the Russian Orthodox Church proclaims the nation's continuing devotion to their Svetoi Andrei. The slanted bar near the bottom of the crucifix represents the X-shaped cross on which, according to legend, Andrew was martyred. His death came while preaching the Good News in the Roman province of Achaia, home of the cities of Athens and Corinth.



WORD BANK

ear * hear * heart * hear * ears * hears * year * dear



God wants to speak to you, because you are very **D E A R** to God. Are you listening?

God is not far away, God is **N E A R** to you each and every day of the **Y E A R**.

You can **H E A R** sounds and noises with one **E A R** or with both **E A R S** but the "ear" that listens to God and **H E A R S** God is really your **H E A R T**!

God speaks to you with love. Are you listening?

Leaflet Activity

In this week's activity, families will be surprised at what they hear when they listen to silence. The children's word game highlights how we best listen to God.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

When the Gathering song is ended, invite the children to be seated. Tell them you are going to give them one minute to spend in complete silence. During that time, they are to listen to all the different sounds around them. When the time is up, ask the children to name the sounds they heard.

Explain that each sound they identified is a little like the voice of God. Make a few comparisons using sounds the children mentioned: God's voice is powerful, like the sound of a car motor; God's voice is gentle, like the sound of your own breathing.

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Please bow your heads for the Opening Prayer. Our response to each short prayer will be, "Open my ears, Lord," each time you hear me say them. Whenever you speak to me in quiet times, open my ears, Lord.

CHILDREN: Open my ears, Lord.

LEADER: Whenever you speak to me through good words from good people, open my ears, Lord.

CHILDREN: Open my ears, Lord.

LEADER: Whenever you speak to me in the words of the Bible, open my ears, Lord.

CHILDREN: Open my ears, Lord.

LEADER: Lord, always you speak to us through the words of sacred Scripture. We promise to listen carefully as you speak to us now, through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: In today's First Reading you will meet Eli and Samuel. Eli was an old, half-blind priest in the city of Shiloh, and Samuel was his young helper. Listen to what happened one night while Samuel was keeping watch in God's house.

Read 1 Samuel 3:4-10, 19. Then say,
"The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning the psalm, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

CHILDREN: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 40:1 and 3ab, 8 and 11.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: In today's Gospel, we are going to hear the story of how Andrew received his call to be a disciple of Jesus.

The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of John.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read John 1:35-42. Then say,*
"The Gospel of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Tell the children you are going to share a few ideas on how God speaks with people. Then base a homily on these ideas and questions:

- God spoke to Samuel in the silence of the night.
 - » Samuel's story teaches us how important it is sometimes to be silent, without any loud music or TV shows blocking out God's voice.
 - » When are the quiet times in your day?
- God spoke to Andrew through another human being: John the Baptist.
 - » What did John tell Andrew when Jesus walked by? ("Here is the Lamb of God!")
 - » "Lamb of God" meant that Jesus was the Messiah. Like an innocent lamb, he was ready to offer his life for his people.
 - » This story teaches us how important it is to pay attention to the words of people around us.
 - » Whenever good people tell us to do good things, God is speaking through them.
 - » We should never listen to people who tell us to think or do bad things.
- God also spoke to Andrew through the Lord Jesus.
 - » What did Jesus ask Andrew and his friend? ("What do you want?") How did they answer? ("Rabbi, where do you live?")
 - » Jesus then took the men home with him, and that's how Andrew became a disciple.
 - » This story teaches us how important it is to pay attention to the words of Jesus. We hear his words in the Gospels. Do you pay close attention to the Gospel when it is read at Mass?

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for our Profession of Faith and repeat, "This I do believe" each time I say it. God is a loving parent who speaks to us every day. This I do believe.

CHILDREN: This I do believe.

LEADER: Jesus is God's Son, whose words show us the way to life everlasting. This I do believe.

CHILDREN: This I do believe.

LEADER: The Holy Spirit is God's own Spirit, who speaks to us in the silence of our hearts. This I do believe.

CHILDREN: This I do believe.

LEADER: The holy, catholic Church is built on the word of God. This I do believe.

CHILDREN: This I do believe.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: Knowing that God will hear our prayers, let us pray in confidence for all that we need. To each petition, please respond, "Lord, hear our prayer." That the leaders of our Church will lead people to Jesus, just as John the Baptist did, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Lord, hear our prayer.

LEADER: That the people of our parish will answer the call of Jesus, just as Andrew did, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Lord, hear our prayer.

LEADER: That the leaders of our town and country will do what God wants, just as Samuel did, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Lord, hear our prayer.

LEADER: *Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:*

Loving God, we know you hear and answer us whenever we call upon you. With the help of your Holy Spirit, may we hear and answer you, too, whenever you call upon us. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

Psalm 25:4–5abc,
6 & 7cd, 8–9

Mark 1:14–20

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a green cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ if available, a few objects to represent the seashore and/or the fishing trade (seashells, fishnet, hooks, lures, and so forth).

Have ready for use during the Homily:

- ☐ empty tin can; slips of paper with remarks written on them (see *Children's Connections*)
- ☐ personal story or a speaker

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Follow Me" (*Seeds CD-1, Track #10*) or **"Come and Follow Me"** (*Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #14*) 8

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (*Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24*)

We Are Called to Follow Jesus

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

Show me your paths and teach me to follow; guide me by your truth and instruct me. You keep me safe, and I always trust you. (PSALM 25:4–5)

Scripture Background

In today's First Reading, we meet Jonah. Called to preach to the hated Ninevites, Jonah lands in all kinds of trouble while trying to escape his call. Today's excerpt from his story narrates what happens when Jonah finally fulfills his mission. Much to his dismay, he becomes an instrument of his enemies' salvation!

The Book of Jonah can be considered a fictional tale written to challenge strong nationalistic sentiments among fifth-century Jews. Its central, divinely inspired message is that God's ultimate plan is to save everyone, and those Jews who believe that God cares for only one nation on earth, theirs, are grossly mistaken. The ancient tale of Jonah thus laid a foundation for the message of universal salvation that Jesus later would preach.

In today's Gospel, Jesus announces the coming of the Kingdom of God and invites the first disciples to help him spread the word. The kingdom is not so much a place as a state of mind. The reach of God's kingdom is extended each time anyone learns about the one true God and consciously decides to live under God's rule.

Major spurts of growth occurred when Jesus began his public ministry and again when his Death And Resurrection released the power of the Spirit upon the earth. According to the Gospels, the reign of God will become final and complete at the end of time, when Jesus comes again.



CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

The purpose of today's homily is to simplify for children a beautiful truth found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God" (2044).

If you wish and if time permits, end the homily with a little game. Show the children an empty tin can, and say you want their help preparing a "can of bait" for a child who wants to be a "fisher of people."

On slips of paper, write an assortment of kind remarks (*May I help you with that? Would you like to play with us? Do you want some of my candy?*) and unkind ones (*Go away; I don't want to play with you! Go get your own; this is mine!*). Read the papers one by one and have the children tell you which ones belong in the bait can and which ones in the garbage can.

Another option is to end the homily with a story

about yourself, in which you tell of a time when others' kindness to you strengthened your faith in God. Or have a guest speaker briefly address the group. Former missionaries usually can tell stories of people who came into the Church because of kindnesses shown to them in Jesus' name; likewise, converts to the faith sometimes can explain their conversions in those terms.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn Jesus' teaching about love, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.



More About ...

Fishing in the Sea of Galilee

The Sea of Galilee, where Peter, Andrew, James, and John plied their trade, was actually a freshwater lake. While some fishermen simply stood along its shores singly casting small nets, others fished with larger nets from boats that could go wherever the fish swam. The four men destined to become apostles belonged to the latter group.

Compared to large ocean-going vessels of the day, their boats were quite simple and small. One boat, operated by the wind power of a single sail, was long enough for only four or five men to stand side-by-side while hoisting a net into the sea. Men in another boat sailing parallel to it handled the other side of the net. Much coordinated effort was required to land a big catch.

How interesting that four men destined to roam well beyond their native land were experienced boatmen! Interesting, too, that they were experienced at teamwork, which surely helped the growth of the early Church.



Leaflet Activity

The family is invited to think about each person's special gifts. The children's activity allows them to imagine themselves together with Jesus.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

As the children enter the worship space, sing or play the suggested song or any hymn that is about discipleship.

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Bow your heads for the Opening Prayer. Our response to each short prayer will be, Lord, you have called me by name.

CHILDREN: Lord, you have called me by name.

LEADER: You have asked me to follow you.

CHILDREN: You have asked me to follow you.

LEADER: Lead me on, O Lord. Amen, amen!

CHILDREN: Lead me on, O Lord. Amen, amen!

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: Where is the last place on earth that you would want to be right now? (Give children time to consider and, possibly, to answer this question.) For the prophet Jonah, that place was Nineveh, because people lived there who were great enemies of his people. Yet guess where God wanted Jonah to go and preach?

Read Jonah 3:1–5, 10. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Teach me your ways, O Lord.

CHILDREN: Teach me your ways, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 25:4–5abc, 6 & 7cd, 8–9.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Gospel Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: In the First Reading, we saw that God sent Jonah all by himself to preach to Nineveh. But many years later, when it was time for Jesus to go out and preach, God wanted Jesus to have some help. Let's listen to how Jesus found his helpers.

LEADER: The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Mark

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read Mark 1:14–20. Then say, "The Gospel of the Lord."*

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your homily.

- The First Reading shows us that God calls everyone to the Kingdom of Heaven, even people we might not like.
- The Gospel shows us that Jesus wants our help in bringing people into the kingdom.
 - » We bring people into the kingdom in much the same way that people catch fish.
- What tools are used to catch fish? (nets, poles, bait)
- When people fish with poles, what do they use for bait? (worms, flies, etc.)
 - » These things are used because fish like them. Flies and worms attract fish.
 - » Do flies and worms attract people? No, but kindness always does!
- Every time you show people kindness for Jesus' sake, you attract them to Jesus.

(Time permitting, end the homily with the game described in Children's Connections.)

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Please repeat each line after me. I believe in God almighty.

CHILDREN: I believe in God almighty.

LEADER: Loving Creator of Heaven and earth.

CHILDREN: Loving Creator of Heaven and earth.

LEADER: I believe in Jesus the Lord.

CHILDREN: I believe in Jesus the Lord.

LEADER: Son of God and son of Mary.

CHILDREN: Son of God and son of Mary.

LEADER: I believe in God the Holy Spirit.

CHILDREN: I believe in God the Holy Spirit.

LEADER: Who gathers together the people of God.

CHILDREN: Who gathers together the people of God.

LEADER: I believe in the holy, catholic Church.

CHILDREN: I believe in the holy, catholic Church.

LEADER: The people of God, called to life eternal.

CHILDREN: The people of God, called to life eternal.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: In today's Gospel, Jesus asked the first apostles for help in bringing people into God's kingdom. Jesus wants our help, too, so let us begin by praying for all those who most need our prayers. To each petition, please respond, "Your kingdom come, O Lord." For the leaders of the Church, that they will be strong in preaching God's message, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Your kingdom come, O Lord.

LEADER: For all of us, that we will attract people to God with the goodness of our lives, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Your kingdom come, O Lord.

LEADER: For all people everywhere, that they will believe the Good News and enter the Kingdom of God, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Your kingdom come, O Lord.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Our Father in Heaven, holy is your name. May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven! This is our hope; this is our prayer, through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Deuteronomy 18:18–19
Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7abcd
Mark 1:21–28

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a green cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a heavy metal pot
- ☐ a delicate china vase

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

Gathering: **"I Am the Way"** (Seeds CD-2, Track #19) or **"The Beatitudes"** (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #17)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)



Jesus Keeps Us Safe

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

Sing joyful songs to the LORD! Praise the mighty rock where we are safe. Come to worship him with thankful hearts and songs of praise.

(PSALM 95:1–2)

Scripture Background

Today's reading from the Chapter 18 of Deuteronomy needs to be seen in the light of an earlier passage of the same book. While camping at the foot of Mount Horeb on their way to the Promised Land, the Israelites see a great show of God's power. The mountain burns with fire as it booms with the voice of the Lord.

The people plead with Moses, "Has anyone else ever heard the only true God speaking from fire, as we have? And even if they have, would they live to tell about it? Moses, go up close and listen to the LORD. Then come back and tell us, and we will do everything he says" (5:26–27). Doing as they ask, Moses ascends the mountain and receives the Ten Commandments to bring back to his people.

In today's selection from Deuteronomy, God promises that in the future he will send another mediator, a great prophet like Moses, to guide his people. Over time many Jewish scholars came to view these words as a messianic prophecy, which Christians in turn applied to Christ Jesus.

Today's Gospel reading confirms that Jesus indeed is the Promised One sent by God. According to Mark, the fishing town of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee was where Jesus first began preaching in earnest.

Situated there in today's Gospel, Jesus holds audiences in the town synagogue spellbound with his interpretations of Jewish law. The townspeople think he makes more sense than anyone else they have ever



More About ...

Casting Out Evil Spirits

In the Church's rite of exorcism, the power to expel demons still exists.

- Paragraph 1673 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: Exorcism is a sacramental in which "the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion."
- Exorcisms are done only when mental illness has been ruled out.
- Exorcisms are performed only by priests who have the permission of their bishops.

heard preach—even though they have listened to some of Palestine's finest Jewish scholars at the temple in Jerusalem.

While Jesus lacks the formal education of scribes and priests, he far outpaces them in the wisdom that comes only with the Holy Spirit. When his preaching suddenly is interrupted by the shouts of a possessed man, what happens next provides proof that Jesus is mighty in both words and deeds. With one simple command, the demon flees the man in terror.

CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

There is no sugarcoating today's Gospel. Part of Jesus' work on earth was subduing evil spirits, whose existence the Catholic Church has always accepted. Demons are spiritual beings created by God and en-

dowed with great intellect, complete freedom of will, and immortality.

Unlike Heaven's angels who made a definitive choice to accept God's reign and live with God in unending joy, devils decided to oppose God's reign and live forever apart from God.

A devil can, and sometimes does, possess a human being, causing great mental and spiritual agony. But these instances are rare, and they do not happen to people who remain firmly united to Christ. Paragraph 395 of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us of two additional points:

- The power of Satan is not infinite. While he can cause temporary human suffering, he cannot prevent the ultimate victory of God's love in human affairs.
- Although God permits the devil to tempt and sometimes even to possess human beings, "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him" (see Romans 8:28).

After hearing today's Gospel, what children most need to know is that Jesus is more powerful than any devil. If we stay close to Jesus, we stay strong in Jesus, and we can flick away evil spirits like so many annoying flies.

USING THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn to depend on Jesus, through a summary of the Scripture story, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.



Leaflet Activity

A family walk allows each member a chance to select a representative rock to use in making a Jesus rock sculpture. The children think and draw about a place where they feel safe.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

As the children enter the worship space, sing or play the suggested song or any hymn that celebrates God's saving power. After the hymn, point to the metal pot and the china vase on display, and ask what would happen if you tried to smash each of them with a rock. Then tell Aesop's fable "The Two Pots." You can find the fable online.

This story's moral is this: "The strong and the weak cannot keep company." We will say more about that in today's homily.

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Please bow your heads for our Opening Prayer. After each part of the prayer, please respond, "Lord, have mercy." Lord, you have power over every creature in Heaven and earth. Lord, have mercy.

CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

LEADER: Lord, when you speak to demons, they run from you in terror. Christ, have mercy.

CHILDREN: Christ, have mercy.

LEADER: But when you speak to your people, they draw near to you in love. Lord, have mercy.

CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

LEADER: Lord, we have come today to hear you speak. May your words find a lasting home in our souls, so that we may praise your name forever and ever.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: In ancient times, God often repeated a promise one day to send the world a Messiah. Listen now as God makes this same promise in a conversation with the great leader and teacher, Moses.

Read Deuteronomy 18:18–19. Then say,
"The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

CHILDREN: If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7abcd.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Gospel Acclamation, proceed to the proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: In today's Gospel, we will see that Jesus, the Messiah who was sent by God, was mighty in word and deed. And guess who feared him most? Listen and you will find out.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Matthew 1:21–28. Then say,
“The Gospel of the Lord.”

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Base a Homily on the following ideas and questions.

- Listen again to these words from today's Gospel. (Read Mark 1:24.)
- Who was talking—the man who suddenly started shouting in the meeting place, or an evil spirit living inside the man?
» Yes, it was an evil spirit—also called a devil or a demon.
- Jesus, however, is stronger than all demons and they know it, so they are afraid of him.
- As long as we remain united with Jesus, demons are afraid of us, too. They fear us the way the china pot feared the metal pot in the story that began today's liturgy.
- Remember the moral of that story? “The strong and the weak cannot keep company.” In today's Gospel, the demon rushes out of the man because, no matter how scary the demon sounds, next to Jesus it is just a harmless little weakling.

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Repeat each line after me.
I believe in almighty God.

CHILDREN: I believe in almighty God.

LEADER: Who is our rock of safety.

CHILDREN: Who is our rock of safety.

LEADER: I believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God.

CHILDREN: I believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God.

LEADER: Who is mighty in word and deed.

CHILDREN: Who is mighty in word and deed.

LEADER: I believe in God the Holy Spirit.

CHILDREN: I believe in God the Holy Spirit.

LEADER: Who keeps us strong in Christ.

CHILDREN: Who keeps us strong in Christ.

LEADER: I believe in the holy, catholic Church.

CHILDREN: I believe in the holy, catholic Church.

LEADER: Built by Christ to last forever.

CHILDREN: Built by Christ to last forever.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: In today's Gospel, we learned we have nothing to fear as long as God is with us. So let us ask our almighty and all-loving God to protect all those we care about. Our response to each petition will be, “Keep them safe, O Lord.” For the leaders of our Church, that Christ will keep them safe from every evil, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Keep them safe, O Lord.

LEADER: For all people living in dangerous places, especially our soldiers and our missionaries overseas, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Keep them safe, O Lord.

LEADER: For all the families of our parish, especially those dealing with health or money problems, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Keep them safe, O Lord.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Almighty and all-loving God, you are our rock of safety in an uncertain world. Thank you for sending us Jesus your Son to keep us strong against every evil. Through his life in us, may you be praised forever and ever.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Job 7:1–4, 6–7
Psalm 147:1, 4, 5 & 7
1 Corinthians 9:16–18
Mark 1:29–39

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a green cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a brown paper bag
- ☐ a felt-tip marker

Have ready for the Homily:

- ☐ a copy of Mary Stevenson's poem, "Footprints in the Sand." (If you don't have a printed copy, you can find it at footprints-in-the-sand.com.)

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Like Jesus" (Seeds CD-1, Track #6) or "The Great Commandment" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #18)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)



Jesus Heals Us

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

Shout praises to the LORD! Our God is kind, and it is right and good to sing praises to him. He renews our hopes and heals our bodies. (PSALM 147:1, 3)

Scripture Background

To a person of faith, it is no surprise when psychological insight and spiritual wisdom intersect. Mental health professionals say that honest expression of feelings is important to the total healing of persons dealing with major loss.

Spiritual leaders say that emotional honesty is an essential part of authentic prayer, even if the emotions include anger at God or disappointment in God's seeming indifference.

Today's reading from the Book of Job shows a man deeply afflicted but well on his way to wholeness because he is able to turn his agony over to God.

In today's Second Reading from 1 Corinthians, Saint Paul discusses his rights as an apostle. Strictly speaking, he is entitled to complete financial support by the communities to whom he preaches. Nevertheless, he decides to support himself with part-time work as a tentmaker.

For Paul, spreading the Gospel is a God-given mission that should not be compromised by any expectations that wealthy patrons might attempt to impose on him. He thus shows in his ministry the same unflinching integrity that Job shows in his prayer.

The Gospel focuses on Jesus as a physical and spiritual healer. While his acts of mercy free people in the here-and-now from pain and suffering, they also show what the coming reign of God will be like.



It will be a time when God will wipe away forever all tears, a time when “there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain” (Revelation 21:4). Thus, the cures that Jesus works accomplish both immediate and ultimate purposes.

CHILDREN’S CONNECTIONS

When you lead today’s Gathering activity, some children may bring up, however generally, traumatic past events that have touched their lives. Don’t worry if this happens.

Dr. Linda Garris Christian, a professor of education who specializes in early childhood, notes that because their grief is cyclical, children need to revisit old hurts time and again in order to heal properly. During each new stage of grieving, simply talking out their feelings is a benefit to them. (For other insights, visit aacap.org, the website of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.)

All troubles great and small can be more easily processed if children are encouraged to talk honestly about them. It also helps them to use art, music, and rituals to express their feelings surrounding their sad experiences.

When you are with the children today, be a good listener. Take seriously each hurt that a child contributes to the opening discussion, even if it concerns something you consider minor or trivial.

People without pets, for example, may not realize how deep the grief runs in a family that has lost an animal friend. For many children, the loss of a pet is the first big loss in their lives.

It is also important, experts say, to help children see that good can come from bad and that people can survive unbelievably painful experiences. Sometimes only the passage of time helps a person find the silver lining in a black cloud, but at any moment during the grieving process one can learn about endurance by observing others who handle crisis and loss with grace.

More About ...

Pantomime the Gospel

To make today’s Gospel a little more dramatic, let the children pantomime it as you read it aloud.

- On the right side of the staging area, place a large drawing of a stick house to represent the Jewish meeting place.
- In the middle, place a drawing of a smaller stick house to represent Simon Peter’s home.
- On the floor, place a mat for Peter’s sick mother-in-law.
- On the left side of the staging area, place a drawing of a cactus to represent the desert.

Start with a girl lying on the mat at Peter’s and everyone else at the Jewish meeting house. When the action shifts to Peter’s house, all the boys will go there. One boy, in the role of Jesus, will cure the girl. Then the remaining girls will go to Peter’s seeking cures, also. When the action shifts to the desert, Jesus will go first, then be joined by his friends.

THE CHILDREN’S LEAFLET

The Children’s Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about Jesus’ healing ministry, through a summary of the Scripture story, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week’s Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.



Leaflet Activity

Recognizing those who carry on Jesus' healing ministry is the focus for this week's family activity. A word search helps the children recall the week's Gospel.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

After the Gathering song and when the children have assembled in the worship area, tell them that today's readings talk about people who are sick or sad, so today we are going to begin by making a "Sad Bag."

Then take the brown bag and the marker from the table and ask the children to name different things that make people sad; as each item is named, write or draw it on the outside of the bag.

When the bag is full of words and symbols, stand it on the table and say, "Let's pretend that all the sorrows of the world are inside this bag. What is the best thing that we can do with our sorrows? Take them to Jesus!"

Opening Prayer

(Use appropriate hand motions to accompany each phrase of this litany.)

LEADER: For our prayer today, please repeat after me the words I say and the prayer motions I use.

Christ, you are before me. Christ, you are behind me.

CHILDREN: Christ, you are before me.

Christ, you are behind me.

LEADER: Christ, you are beneath me.

Christ, you are above me.

CHILDREN: Christ, you are beneath me.

Christ, you are above me.

LEADER: Christ, you are on my left.

Christ, you are on my right.

CHILDREN: Christ, you are on my left.

Christ, you are on my right.

LEADER: Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, we know you are always with us to help us whenever we need it. Thank you for being our loving God forever and ever.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: Sometimes troubled people don't know where to turn for help, but that isn't true for a man named Job in today's First Reading. After losing everything and everyone that was important to him, he takes all of his hurt and angry feelings to God.

Read Job 7:1-4, 6-7. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted.

CHILDREN: Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 147:1, 4, 5 and 7.*

Second Reading

LEADER: We know that Job's story ends with God helping him. In today's Second Reading, Saint Paul talks about the work God gave him to do, which is to share the good news that Christ saves us all from sorrow and sin.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-18. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Gospel Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: In today's Gospel, we hear how Jesus helped all the sick people he met in a town where he was staying.

The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Mark.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Mark 1:29–39. Then say, "The Gospel of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Help the children understand the following points:

- Some of the sick people in today's Gospel were old; some were young.
- Some had been sick a long time, maybe 30 to 40 years, and some, perhaps only a few hours.
- God always helps us with our troubles: sometimes sooner, sometimes later, but always at the time that God knows is best.
- Sometimes God helps us without our even knowing it or feeling it. (To illustrate this final point, read and discuss the poem, "Footprints in the Sand.")

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, "I do." Do you believe in God, the Father, who always hears our cries for help?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who heals us of sickness and sin?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, who gives us courage when we are in trouble?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in the holy, catholic Church, the gathering place of all who believe in Jesus?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: At the beginning of today's liturgy, we made a "Sad Bag." Now let's use some of the thoughts we shared at that time to pray for all the suffering people of the world. Our response to each prayer will be, "Lord, hear our prayer."

(Take the bag from the table and use the words and symbols on it to make up petitions recalling your earlier discussion of things that make people sad. End each petition with the phrase, "Let us pray to the Lord." For example, "For all people who have lost family members in accidents, let us pray to the Lord." If time permits, also invite the children to add their own petitions.)

Loving God, you sent us Jesus to heal us in mind, body, and spirit. We know he is the doctor who never leaves our side and the friend who stays with us. Like Job, who never lost faith in God, may we never lose faith in your Son. This we ask through the same Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

Psalm 32:1, 5ab, 11

Mark 1:40–45

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a green cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ On or near the table, place the letters VIP cut out of colored paper

For the Gospel: With two teenagers, rehearse a short skit portraying today's Gospel, so that you can substitute their enactment for the reading. The teens playing Jesus and the leper will memorize the lines of dialogue in Mark 1:40–44. When the leper first enters the scene, he or she will be completely covered by a blanket. After being cured, the leper will throw off the blanket and stare in amazement at arms, hands, and body. You, acting as narrator, will read aloud the Gospel's final verse, Mark 1:45.

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"LOVE God" (*Seeds CD-2, Track #21*) or **"The Beatitudes"** (*Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #17*)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia" (*Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24*)

Jesus Heals Everyone

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

Our God, you bless everyone whose sins you forgive and wipe away.
(PSALM 32:1)

Scripture Background

"I can do whatever I want as long as no one else gets hurt!" Today's First Reading holds Christians to a much higher moral standard than the one reflected in this statement.

Saint Paul says that literally everything the Corinthians do should glorify God. Not only should they never harm their neighbors but also, to the greatest extent possible, they should help their neighbors and even please them.

That is, after all, how Jesus lived his life. Every single person was important to him, whether healthy or ill, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, man or woman. Everyone was a VIP.

Jesus' unconditional love included the leper he cures in today's Gospel. In those days, the term *leprosy* covered a wide range of skin diseases, from mild to serious, all of which produced the same social consequences.

Lepers weren't allowed to enter towns or otherwise to interact with healthy people until they were cured. If that happened, they had to visit a priest for an elaborate cleansing ritual, and the priest alone could declare them free to reenter society.

Strictly speaking, Jesus should not have touched the leper. Doing so violated Jewish purity laws and put his own health at risk (or so it was thought). Onlookers believed that Jesus had contaminated himself. Jesus, however, never stood on ceremony or worried about his own welfare when faced with someone in need. As Jesus' followers today, we must ask ourselves: Have we touched any lepers lately?



CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

Today's readings offer a good opportunity to discourage children from treating any other child like a leper or an outcast. It is usually in groups, not as individuals, that children victimize other children, and even the nicest members of a group may join in, much to the surprise of the people who know them best, including their parents and teachers.

The habit of forming cliques begins as early as kindergarten, and unfortunately, some cliques end up teasing and bullying the most vulnerable of their peers. Which children are usually the targets of teasing? Judith Caprez, former associate professor of social work at Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas, offers a list: children with developmental or physical disabilities, those with emotional problems, children without the latest clothing styles or the newest toys, children who are naturally shy and insecure.

If the bullying is left unchecked, Caprez adds, these bullied children go on to develop other problems. Their grades may fall. They may become sick or depressed. They may have trouble eating or sleeping.

Making and keeping friends can become difficult. Last and perhaps worst, they may seek revenge on their attackers or vent rage against someone weaker or younger than themselves.

"Children can be cruel," the old adage goes, but that's no reason to let children live, unchallenged, by the laws of the jungle. They must learn respect and empathy for the very persons they are most likely to mistreat. (For more information, visit these websites: bullying.org and bullies2buddies.com.)

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn Jesus' teaching about helping others, through a summary of the Scripture story, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

More About ...

Jesus' Messianic Mission

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus often heals someone, then asks the person not to tell anyone about it. Scholars call this aspect of Mark "the Messianic secret."

In 1901, German scholar Wilhelm Wrede speculated that perhaps Jesus downplayed his mighty deeds because he did not in fact see himself as the Messiah. Expressing the consensus of Catholic scholars, Raymond E. Brown pronounces that viewpoint "most implausible" in his book *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (1994).

Brown adds that our Lord's main concern was probably the political expectations that some would impose on him if they learned his true identity too soon in his career of preaching and healing.

Despite some people's fondest hopes—usually arising from a misreading of biblical prophecy—Jesus knew that his messianic mission would not include establishing an earthly kingdom, conquering foreign rulers, or functioning as an earthly ruler.

WORD BANK

trust you I Jesus in dear year

D E A R J E S U S .

I T R U S T

I N Y O U .



Leaflet Activity

Reaching out to help the lonely or the left out is this week's suggestion for families. The children write a short but important note to Jesus.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

When the Gathering song has ended, call the children's attention to the letters VIP on display and pose these questions:

- Who knows what these three letters are?
- What do they mean?
- Can you name some VIPs in today's world?
- If a VIP asks for a special favor, how do other people usually respond?

Tell the children that you will say more about VIPs a little later in the liturgy.

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Please bow your heads for the Opening Prayer. Heavenly Father, we have our own ideas about which people on earth are VIPs. But who do you think is a VIP? Help us to learn your ways as we listen to your holy word today. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: Long ago, Saint Paul started a new Christian church in a busy seaport town called Corinth. Because all different kinds of people lived there, they didn't always get along. In today's read-

ing, Paul gives them some good advice about how to avoid problems.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1. Then say, "The word of the Lord."

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble.

CHILDREN: I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 32:1, 5ab, 11.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Gospel Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: Do you know what Paul was really saying in that First Reading? Treat everyone like a VIP! This was what Jesus always did. In today's Gospel, Jesus meets a leper, somebody with a bad skin disease that everybody else avoided. Notice how Jesus acts when he meets the leper.

The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Mark.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Mark 1:40–45. Then say,
“The Gospel of the Lord.”

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Base a homily on the following questions and ideas.

- Other people would have told the leper to go away; what did Jesus say?
- Other people would not have let the leper come near them; what did Jesus do?
- How do you suppose the leper felt when other people always ran away from him?
- How did he feel when Jesus didn't? Jesus set an example for us to follow: we should never “gang up” against people who are different from us. For example, should children be teased if they:
 - are smaller or bigger than other children their age?
 - don't wear the latest styles or own the newest toys?
 - learn faster or slower than other children?
 - have speech impairments or other problems?
 - never play sports or don't play them very well?
 - are very shy and seldom talk?

Remember, to Jesus all these children are VIPs.

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand now, join hands, and form a circle. In our circle, we symbolize all God's people, together in love, with no one left out. Please stand for the Profession of Faith. Respond to each question with the words, “I do.”

Do you believe in God, our loving Father, who loves all his children and thinks each one is special?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus, God's only Son, who treated everyone like a VIP?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, who brings people together in unity and peace?

CHILDREN: I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in the holy, catholic Church, begun by Christ to be a community of love?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: We are the Church of Christ, but sometimes we are not a community of love. We do not treat others like the VIPs that they really are. Today, let's pray to the Holy Spirit for unity and healing. Our response to each petition will be, “Come, O Healing Spirit.” For the Holy Father and all leaders of the Church, that God's Spirit will fill them with love for everyone in their care, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Come, O Healing Spirit.

LEADER: For all the people of our town and parish, that God's Spirit will fill us with love for one another, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Come, O Healing Spirit.

LEADER: For all children who have been teased or bullied, that God's Spirit will fill them with comfort and peace, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Come, O Healing Spirit.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Lord, sometimes it is hard to be good. But with the help of your Holy Spirit, we know we can be everything you want us to be. Help us to grow in love for all people, especially those who are different from us. This we ask through Christ, our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Today's Readings

Genesis 9:8–15

Psalms 25:4–5abc, 6 & 7cd

Mark 1:12–15

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a violet cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle

Have ready for the Homily:

- ☐ a stack of magazines the size of Time, enough to give one magazine to each child in attendance.

Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

GATHERING:

"Hello, Jesus" (Seeds CD-2, Track #18) or **"These Ashes"** (Promise & Good News CD-1, Track #15)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Glory and Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #23)



Believe the Good News

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

I offer you my heart, LORD God, and I trust you. Don't make me ashamed or let enemies defeat me. You are honest and merciful, and you teach sinners how to follow your path. (PSALM 25:1–2, 8)

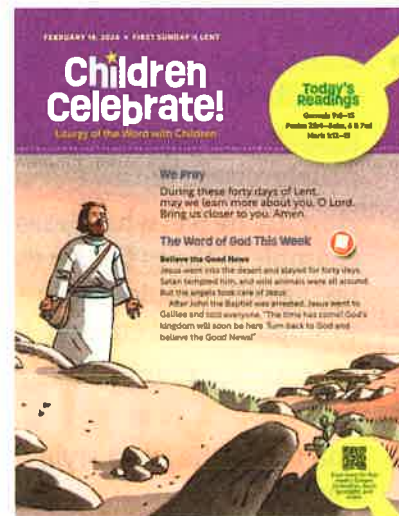
Scripture Background

Today's First Reading comes from the Genesis account of the great flood. As noted by Lawrence Boadt in *The Catholic Study Bible*, Noah's story follows a pattern typical of several ancient Bible stories: (1) God acts with love toward people; (2) the people rebel; (3) God warns of coming disaster; (4) God administers a just punishment for people's sins; (5) God again acts with love toward people.

Given this pattern, we are being "biblically incorrect" if we look at the flood as a ruthless destruction of the earth. Rather, it is a helpful cleansing. God used the flood to clear the way for new life in a new world, one in which God and humanity are reconciled.

In the Gospel, Jesus reenacts humankind's ancient struggle to remain faithful to God despite temptation. Led to the desert by the same Holy Spirit so powerfully present at his Baptism, Jesus deals with the discomforts of hunger and thirst and the dangers of wild beasts before finally facing down the devil himself. But this time he breaks the ancient cycle of sin and punishment by refusing the devil's enticements.

Because of Jesus, we can enjoy the fruits of victory over temptation and sin. As Christians, we continue to hear the Good News that Jesus began preaching after his sojourn in the desert. Continuing need to return to basics makes his ancient message ever new for us, too: "Turn back to God and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15)



CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

In today's homily, you will discuss three traditional Lenten practices: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The strictest form of fasting is giving up food entirely for a set period of time—a practice inadvisable for children to try.

When you talk about fasting, make sure children understand there are different kinds of fasting. For Catholics 14 years of age and older, not eating meat on Fridays is a requirement during Lent. That is one kind of fast. Cutting down on unhealthy treats is another kind. Still another is spending less time watching TV or using electronic devices for entertainment.

Even for children, Lent can be a good time to restore balance to any part of life that has gotten out-of-balance. The same can be said for families. In the late 1960s, one Kansas family always gave up TV for Lent, spending their evening hours playing board games

instead. They jokingly referred to Lent as their time to become a family again.

Share with the children any Lenten penances that you have tried, especially those you or your family did when you were a child. This will stimulate their thinking for this week's family activity suggested in the children's leaflet.

THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about the meaning of Lent, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week's Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

More About ...

Lent: A Time for Remembering

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides these additional insights into the Scripture readings in today's liturgy:

- We begin Lent with the story of the flood because, during special seasons of the year, the Church "re-reads and re-lives the great events of salvation history in the 'today' of her liturgy" (1095).
- The story of Christ's temptation in the desert vividly demonstrates the truth of the words in the Letter to the Hebrews: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning" (540).
- Concerning Lent in general, the *Catechism* notes that these 40 days are set aside for "intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works)" (1438).

Leaflet Activity

Families decide on a Lenten practice that works for them. The children recall the message of John the Baptist through a fun connect-the-words activity.



Gods Kingdom will soon be here!

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

LEADER: There is a race that Jesus wants everyone to enter—the race for the Kingdom of Heaven. Today I want you to pretend that this wall is the kingdom and, starting from the opposite wall, you will be racing to the “kingdom.” Each of you, however, must walk, not run, while keeping your arms folded and a magazine balanced on top of your head. (Demonstrate how this is done.) If your magazine falls to the floor during the race, you must stop, put it back on top of your head, refold your arms, and continue the race. (After the activity is finished, settle the children for discussion.)

Everyone please sit down now. I have a few questions about the race.

- Who won the race? Who came in second? Third?
- There is no time today, but if the race were run again, what would happen if only the three winners raced with magazines on their heads and everyone else raced without them? Would today's winners be the winners again? Why or why not?

Opening Prayer

LEADER: Please bow your heads for prayer. Dear God, we couldn't go very fast in today's race because things on our heads were slowing us down. In the real race to your kingdom, sometimes things inside our heads slow us down, and they are there because

we let them in. We see toys advertised on TV and we want them. Then, when it is time to share what we have with others, we make a fuss and drag our feet. Every time we do that we are dragging our feet in the race to your kingdom! Lord, we are sorry, and we promise to do better, through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: Have you heard the Bible story about Noah and the great flood? In ancient times, God sent a flood to punish the world's sinners but saved Noah by telling him to build a big boat before the rains came. In today's First Reading, the flood is over and Noah's family has returned to dry land. *Read Genesis 9:8–15.* Then say, “The word of the Lord.”

CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

LEADER: Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

CHILDREN: Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 25:4–5abc, 6 and 7cd.*

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Gospel Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: Today's Gospel tells about Jesus right after his Baptism in the Jordan River. He was almost ready to begin his mission of preaching the Good News, but there was still one more thing he needed to do. Can you guess what it was?

LEADER: The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Mark.

CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: Read Mark 1:12–15. Then say,
“The Gospel of the Lord.”

CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Base a Homily on these ideas.

- Before Jesus could begin his important mission, he needed time alone with God. He spent 40 days in the desert, praying and fasting.
- During that time, Satan tried to talk him out of fulfilling his mission, but Jesus remained faithful to God. Every year during Lent, we imitate what Jesus did in the desert; we spend 40 days focusing on what God wants of us.
- We do more praying than usual. We do less eating than usual (or less of anything that we might have been overdoing lately). We give extra help to the poor. Prayer, fasting, and helping the poor are three ways of “lightening our load” in the race to God’s kingdom.

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for our Profession of Faith and repeat each line after me. I believe in God the Father who made heaven and earth.

CHILDREN: I believe in God the Father who made heaven and earth.

LEADER: I believe in Christ his Son who became human.

CHILDREN: I believe in Christ his Son who became human.

LEADER: That we might turn to God and believe the Good News.

CHILDREN: That we might turn to God and believe the Good News.

LEADER: I believe in the Holy Spirit who led Jesus to the desert.

CHILDREN: I believe in the Holy Spirit who led Jesus to the desert.

LEADER: And leads the Church today.

Children: And leads the Church today. Church, the

community of God dedicated to showing the world that God is love?

CHILDREN: I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: We are the Church, and the Holy Spirit leads us on our journey through Lent. Just think, if we always go where the Spirit leads, one day we will enter the Kingdom of Heaven! To each petition, please respond, “Your kingdom come, O Lord.” For the leaders of the Church, that their preaching and example will turn many hearts to God, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Your kingdom come, O Lord.

LEADER: For the people of our parish, that all will grow close to God during these 40 days of Lent, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Your kingdom come, O Lord.

LEADER: For the people of our town and country, that all will be guided by God’s truth, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Your kingdom come, O Lord.

LEADER: For all people who walk on the path of evil, that they will repent and believe the Good News, let us pray to the Lord.

CHILDREN: Your kingdom come, O Lord.

LEADER: Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Let us pray. Loving God, please help us give up all those things that could weigh us down in our Lenten journey. We ask you to make us strong in spirit, just as Jesus was strong, through Christ our Lord.

CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven’t already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week’s Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.

Music

For planning music, it is best to ask the advice of the parish music minister. If the selections planned for the main assembly for any given weekend are also appropriate for children, use the same music. Because that may not always be possible, *Children Celebrate!* gives suggestions for each Sunday.

Most of the music is available from Pflaum Publishing Group on two sets of CDs. The CD sets are part of the new Pflaum Gospel Weeklies music collection correlated to the seasons of the Liturgical Year, featuring songs by well-known Catholic composer John Burland and others.

To view or print the lyrics to the songs, visit gospelweeklies.com/lyrics.

For your convenience here, the song titles are color coded to the names of the two CD sets used in *Children Celebrate!*—**purple** for Seeds and **red** for Promise.

TITLE/COMPOSER

Away in a Manger
(TRADITIONAL)

Christ, Be Our Light
(FARRELL— [HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/KMKFKXLCM5Q](https://youtu.be/KMKFKXLCM5Q))

CHOICES
(BURLAND)

Christmas Star
(BURLAND)

Come and Follow Me
(BURLAND/PARADISE)

Follow Me
(VAGLE)

Glory and Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ
(BURLAND)

Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia
(BURLAND)

Hello Jesus
(BURLAND)

I Am the Way
(BURLAND/PARADISE)

Jesus Is Coming
(VAGLE)

LOVE God
(BURLAND/PARADISE)

Like Jesus
(VAGLE)

Mary, O Blessed One
(BURLAND)

Mary, Our Mother
(BURLAND)

Saying Yes
(BURLAND)

The Beatitudes
(BURLAND/PARADISE)

The Great Commandment
(BURLAND/PARADISE)

The Holy Family
(BURLAND/PARADISE)

The Promise, Part 1
(BURLAND)

The Promise, Part 2
(BURLAND)

The Promise, Part 2
(BURLAND)

These Ashes
(BURLAND)



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2-CD Set PGW-5202

TO ORDER CALL 800-543-4383
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To purchase MP3s, visit www.giamusic.com/store/pflaum-gospel-weeklies

Leader's Checklist

NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
1 2 3 4	1 2	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3
5 6 7 8 9 10 11	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	7 8 9 10 11 12 13	4 5 6 7 8 9 10
12 13 14 15 16 17 18	10 11 12 13 14 15 16	14 15 16 17 18 19 20	11 12 13 14 15 16 17
19 20 21 22 23 24 25	17 18 19 20 21 22 23	21 22 23 24 25 26 27	18 19 20 21 22 23 24
26 27 28 29 30	24 25 26 27 28 29 30	28 29 30 31	25 26 27 28 29
	31		

SUNDAY	PREPARATIONS /PROPS	MUSIC	LECTOR	SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND	HOMILY PREP	CHILDREN'S LEAFLETS	OTHER
11/26/23 Christ the King							
12/3/23 1st Advent							
12/10/23 2nd Advent							
12/17/23 3rd Advent							
12/24/23 4th Advent							
12/31/23 Holy Family							
1/7/24 Epiphany							
1/14/24 2nd OT							
1/21/24 3rd OT							
1/28/24 4th OT							
2/4/24 5th OT							
2/11/24 6th OT							
2/18/24 1st Lent							

Notes

What worked well in these sessions?

What types of activities best engage the children?

What are some areas for improvement?

Ideas for upcoming sessions:
