

We Believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God

Session Focus

This session explores our belief in Jesus, the Son of God and Second Person of the Blessed Trinity: “I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man” (Nicene Creed). The session engages the participants in discovering what it means to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and what Jesus teaches us about the qualities of God through his words and actions.

Learning Objectives

The session on God guides learners of all ages to . . .

- name the qualities of God presented in the Gospels through the words and actions of Jesus Christ
- recognize the significance of believing in Jesus Christ, Son of God, and his revelation of God through his life and ministry
- deepen their belief Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and its impact on their daily lives as Christians

Session Overview

Part 1. (10 minutes) Gathering and Opening Prayer Service

Part 2. (10 minutes) All Ages Learning Experience: Who Is Jesus?

Part 3. (90-120 minutes) In Depth Learning Experience: Jesus, Son of God

- Format: Learning Activity Centers
 1. Jesus Teaches Parables of the Kingdom of God
 2. Jesus is God’s Beloved Son
 3. Jesus Heals People
 4. Jesus Forgives Sin
 5. Jesus Raises People from the Dead
 6. Jesus Feeds People
 7. Jesus is Born
 8. Stories of Jesus (Storytelling Center)

Part 4. (5 minutes) Sharing Learning Experiences

Part Five (5 minutes) Closing Prayer Service

Design Option for In Depth Learning: Learning Activity Centers

The Learning Activity Center Format provides structured learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area. Learning activity centers are self-contained learning experiences, focusing on a specific topic or theme. They include brief presentations by the facilitators, interactive and experiential activities, group discussion and sharing. Each center can utilize a different learning method, such as drama or role play, creative arts, prayer, ritual, film, games, demonstrations, exhibits, and music.

One of the best ways to envision a Learning Activity Center Format is to imagine visiting a children's museum or one of the Epcot pavilions at Walt Disney World in Orlando. You will find a variety of interactive, experiential exhibits, media presentations, and staff-facilitated learning activities.

Learning Activity Centers can be used with all age groups. They can be developed for an intergenerational audience or for particular age groups, such as families with children or adolescents or adults. Learning Activity Centers can also be utilized in the families with children learning program within the Age Group Format.

Scheduling

Learning Activity Centers are designed to be conducted within a 20-30 minute timeframe. Depending on the session design, this will allow three or four learning periods to be offered during the In Depth Learning Experience.

Here is a sample schedule with four rounds of learning centers:

- 6:00 Hospitality and Dinner
- 6:30 Part 1. Gathering and Prayer
Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience
- 6:50 Round 1: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:15 Break (move to next center)
- 7:20 Round 2: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:45 Break (move to next center)
- 7:50 Round 3: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:15 Break (move to next center)
- 8:20 Round 4: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:45 Part 4: Presenting the Home Activities (no small group sharing)
Part 5: Closing Prayer

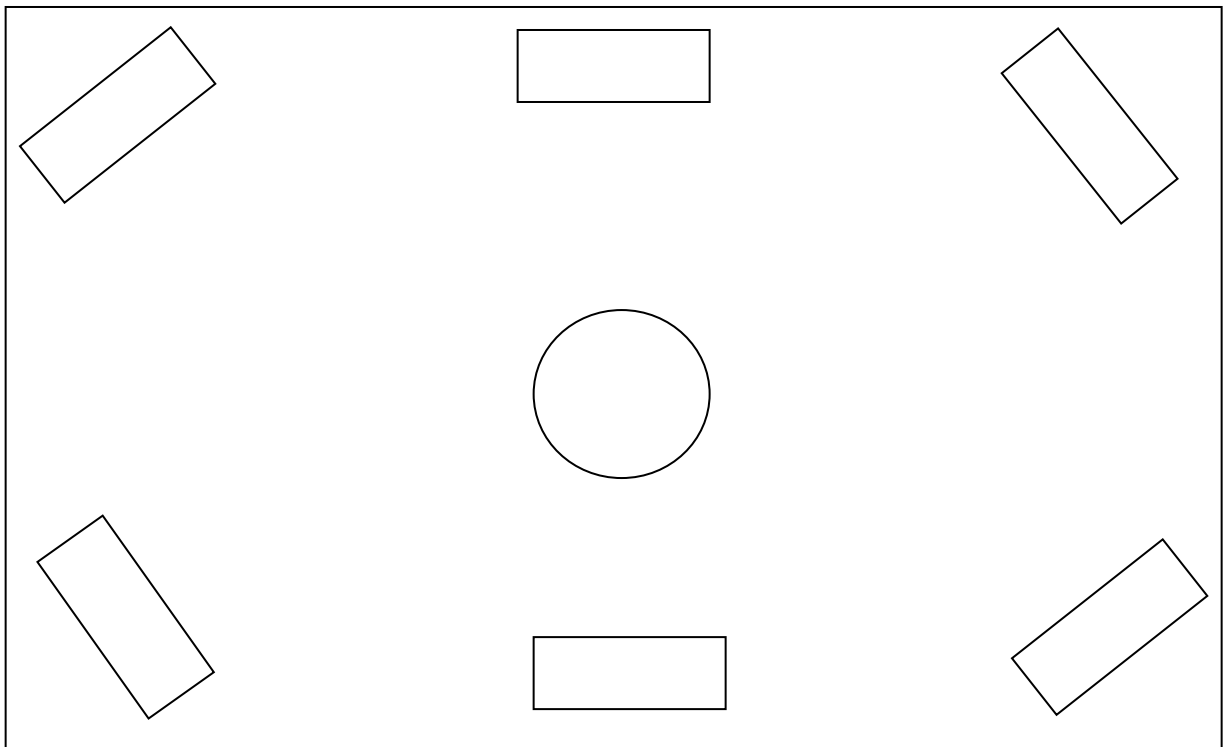
Here is a sample schedule with three rounds of learning centers:

- 6:00 Hospitality and Dinner
- 6:30 Part 1. Gathering and Prayer
Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience
- 7:00 Round 1: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:25 Break (move to next center)
- 7:30 Round 2: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:55 Break (move to next center)
- 8:00 Round 3: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:25 Break (gather in intergenerational groups)

8:30 Part 4: Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application
8:50 Closing Prayer

Organizing the Activity Centers

There are two ways to set up activity centers: one large room, or multiple break-out rooms. If you arrange all of the learning centers in one large meeting gym or church hall, set-up the centers around the outside of the room (see example). The center space can become a storytelling center with a carpet or chairs for children to sit. The example below shows six different learning centers plus the storytelling center. You may still need separate rooms if you have a learning center that focuses on prayer (worship space) or shows a film (meeting room).



Keep in mind the following when organizing in one room:

- Make sure there is adequate space between learning centers so that people are not interrupted by the activity at other centers.
- Set-up each learning activity center with tables and chairs (or carpeted floor space) for participants to listen, discuss, and create. Children and teens can use the floor, but adults will need chairs.
- Assign each learning center a number and post the number on the wall and floor at each center.

If you arrange learning centers in multiple rooms such as meeting rooms, classrooms, church hall, gym, worship space, assign one learning center to each space. This format resembles a conference where people move from room to room for each session. Place the learning center name outside each room and develop a list of centers with locations, and a map if necessary, so that people can easily find the correct room.

Organizing Groups

Once you have determined how many learning centers you will offer, you can organize participants accordingly. If you offer four learning centers, you can organize the participants into four groups of equal size and assign each group a specific sequence that they will move through the learning centers. Assign a number to each learning center and an alphabet letter to each group, then describe how they will move through the centers: Group A: 1-2-3-4; Group B: 2-3-4-1, Group C: 3-4-1-2, and Group D: 4-1-2-3. If you offer three learning centers, there would be three groups rotating among the three learning centers. Keep families together in one group.

If you offer more than three or four learning centers, allow people to choose the learning centers they are going to experience. Remind them that if a particular center is crowded, they can move to another center and then return to their first choice in another round. Families with children should stay together because the activities require parents to work with their children.

Staffing

Each center is facilitated by a team of facilitators/catechists who guide the participants through the activity plan. The teaching team facilitates the overall learning plan for the center: making presentations, guiding learning activities, organizing discussions, and so on. The number of team members needed depends on the complexity of the activities and the number of participants at a learning center. Teams should have at least two or three people, but some centers will require five or six people. Older adolescents can also serve as members of the teaching team, and are especially valuable in facilitating creative activities and dramatic presentations.

To present the focus of each learning activity center, ask the teaching teams to present a very brief overview of what they will be doing in each center. Give each participant the list of learning activity centers with short descriptions, a schedule and the locations of the centers.

Materials Needed

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Opening Prayer Service for assembly use
- Bible

In-Depth Learning Experiences

- Handout #1: Jesus, Son of God, Journal
- The materials participants will need is are identified in each Learning Activity Center plan.

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering (10 minutes)

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handout for Opening Prayer
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using the words below or your own words.

This session explores our belief in Jesus, the Son of God and second person of the Blessed Trinity: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man” (Nicene Creed). The session engages the participants in discovering what it means to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and what Jesus teaches us about the qualities of God through his words and actions.

1. Group Formation

This program utilizes a learning activity center format. Eight learning centers are developed for your use. Each activity lasts from 20-30 minutes, allowing everyone to participate in at least four learning activities within the two-hour timeframe. Once you have determined how many learning centers you will offer, you can organize participants accordingly.

2. Opening Prayer Service

Preparation

Identify a reader for the John passage.

Gather

God of love, Father of all,
the darkness that covered the earth
has given way to the bright dawn of your Word made Flesh.

Make us a people of this light.
Make us faithful to your Word,
that we may bring your life to the waiting world.

Grant this Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Listen

John 1:1-5, 11-12, 14

In the beginning was the Word.
And the Word was with God
and the Word was God;
he was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him
and without him nothing came to be,
Whatever has come to be, found life in him.
life which for humans was light.
Light that shines in the dark:
light that darkness could not overcome.

He came to his own,
yet his own people did receive him;
but all who have received him
he empowers to become children of God
for they believe in his Name.

And the Word was made flesh;
he had his tent pitched among us,
and we have seen the Glory,
the Glory of the only Son
coming from the Father:
fullness of truth and loving-kindness.

Respond

Jesus, Son of God, you became one of us to reveal the Father's love.
Response: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Jesus, Son of God, you liberate captives and forgive our sins.
Response: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Jesus, Son of God, you were sent by the Father to heal our blindness.
Response: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Jesus, Son of God, you are living bread that nourishes our hearts by you words.
Response: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Jesus, Son of God, you came to light a fire on earth.
Response: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Jesus, Son of God, you are risen from dead to show us the path to life.
Response: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Jesus, Son of God, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Light.

Response: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Go Forth

Gracious God, we are filled with new hope
by the coming of your Word, Jesus Christ, among us.
May we see Christ in our families and in our relationships,
May the light of faith shine in our words and actions.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience (10 minutes)

The All Ages Learning Experience is a brief introduction to the theological focus of the program and a description of the learning activity centers. Offer the following introduction by Maura Hagarty, using the words below or your own words.

Imagine that Jesus is with you and your family or friends. “Who do you say that I am?” he asks. Try to imagine how you would respond. Do you speak or listen to the others? If you speak, what do you say? What do the others say? In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus asks his disciples the same question. Peter replies, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16, cf. Luke 9:20, Mark 8:29). What do Peter’s words mean to you? Do you think of Jesus in this way?

Christianity is rooted in the fact that the followers of Jesus, like Peter, recognized that he was more than human. The disciples believed they encountered God through him. Early on Christians began calling Jesus “Lord,” the same word the Jews used to refer to Yahweh, because they believed that the holy man from Nazareth was divine. Paul called Jesus the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15).

The point here is not that the first disciples were simply given information about Jesus to pass on to others. It is that through their relationships with Jesus, they experienced the outpouring of God’s love and an invitation to participate in the divine life. The disciples were convinced of Jesus’ divine identity because their experience with Jesus transformed them. In Christ, they had a new life that they had not known before.

Jesus was not simply a great human being, though he was that, nor was he a divine being that only appeared to take on the form of a man. Neither was Jesus part human and part divine. Through Jesus, God entered human history in an absolutely unique way. This is at the heart of Catholic faith. God became human while remaining truly God.

Christians use the term “incarnation” to describe the belief that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Jesus is God “incarnate,” which means “in the flesh.” When we pray the Nicene Creed, as we do most Sundays at Mass, we express our belief in Jesus’ divinity in this way:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.

Jesus' divine nature does not absorb or nullify his humanity. He had a fully human mind and will, he used his human hands to work, and he felt love with his human heart. Jesus was truly like us in everything except sin.

Learning Activity Centers

Develop a presentation that introduces the concept of learning activity centers, a description of each activity center, the schedule, and location of the centers. One way to introduce each center is to have one team member, who is conducting the center, provide a brief overview of what will happen at the center. Customize the following outline to prepare your introduction.

Purpose

To discover the qualities of God by exploring a variety of Gospel stories that present the words and actions of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Concept

Each learning activity center provides an interactive and experiential way for people to explore one aspect of Jesus' divinity through Gospel stories.

Activity centers will explore the birth of Jesus and stories from the Gospels of Jesus teaching the parables, being baptized, healing people, forgiving people, raising people from the dead, and feeding people. (Identify the content of the centers you will actually offer.)

Activity centers will engage participants in presentations, discussions, and activities. Several centers include dramatic presentations, while others engage you in creative arts or prayer or a ritual activity. One center includes a film presentation. There is even one that includes eating. If the children get tired, there is a storytelling center just for them.

Each center is staffed by a team who will guide participants through the learning activities.

Each center is designed for all ages, participants can select the centers that interest them the most. Families with children need to stay together.

This will be a fun and exciting way to learn about Jesus and how he teaches us who God really is.

Overview

Use your learning activity center teams to present a very brief overview of what they will be doing in each center. Give each participant the list of learning activity centers with short descriptions, a schedule and the locations of the centers.

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience (90-120 minutes)

Learning Activity Centers

Each learning center is designed for 20-30 minutes, allowing everyone to participate in three or four learning activities (see schedule in prior section). If you conduct four learning periods, eliminate the group sharing in Part Four Sharing Learning Experiences and move to conduct the closing prayer.

Learning Activity Centers

1. Jesus Teaches Parables of the Kingdom of God
2. Jesus Is God's Beloved Son
3. Jesus Heals People
4. Jesus Forgives Sin
5. Jesus Raises People from the Dead
6. Jesus Feeds People
7. Jesus is Born (Three learning centers that you can choose from or conduct sequentially.)
8. Stories of Jesus (Storytelling Center – select Jesus storybooks to read to children)

Adolescents and adults receive a journal to record their reflections after each learning activity center (see Handout #1).

Children can record their reflections through a creative drawing activity. Here are two options for children:

- **The Gift of Jesus:** Children write/draw their reflections on the side of a box that will be assembled at the end of the evening. They can draw a picture of Jesus or a symbol or write key words or a quotes from a Gospel story on their box.
- **Symbols of Jesus:** In a scrapbook children can write the name of the activity center and then draw a symbol that reflects what they learned about Jesus, e.g., Jesus is God's beloved Son—a dove coming down on Jesus, Jesus feeds people—loaves or fishes.

Post several large sheets of paper (butcher paper or table cloth paper) around the room and create "Jesus Banners" where people can write down who Jesus is for them and what they are learning about Jesus from the activity centers. Have crayons and marking pens available.

Learning Activity Center 1

Jesus Teaches Parables of the Kingdom of God

This learning activity center explores what we can learn about Jesus, the Son of God, and the Kingdom of God from the parables that Jesus taught.

Scripture Focus

- Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat: Matthew 13:24-30 (16th Sunday of the Year-A)
- Parable of the Mustard Seed: Matthew 13:31-32 (16th Sunday of the Year-A)
- Parable of the Yeast: Matthew 13:33 (16th Sunday of the Year-A)
- Three Parables: Treasure, Pearls, Net: Matthew 13:44-52 (17th Sunday of the Year-B)
- The Parable of the Rich Fool: Luke 12:13-21 (18th Sunday of the Year-C)
- The Parable of the Lost Sheep: Luke 15:1-7 (24th Sunday of the Year-C)
- The Parable of the Lost Coin: Luke 15:8-10 (24th Sunday of the Year-C)

Environment and Preparation

Develop a prayer space with images from the parables that Jesus told about the Kingdom of God, for example, wheat, plants, yeast and dough, seed, treasure chest, pearls, fishing net, coins, candles. Display the items on the table or mount pictures or posters on a foam core or poster board display.

Place the Bible in a central place on the prayer table.

Gather a variety of common objects from everyday life that can be used to illustrate what the Kingdom of God is like. Display them on a table. You can also display items using photographs mounted on a display board. Here are several examples of items:

- personal items and clothing
- food
- household and kitchen items
- media: books/magazines/newspapers, music, radio, TV, film
- cell phone

Make copies of the worksheet, "Parables of the Kingdom of God," for each parent, teen, and adult participant.

Materials

- See items listed under Environment and Preparation
- Bible
- Display boards: cardboard or foam core
- Newsprint or poster board, markers, masking tape
- Worksheet for each parent, adolescent, and adult
- Pens/pencils for each participant
- File card for each participant

Leader Background

We can define the Kingdom of God as *the redemptive presence of God*. This redemptive (or saving) presence of God can be found in everyday personal experiences. Whenever people love one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens, work to build up a just and peaceful community—wherever people are of humble heart, open to their Creator and serving their neighbor—God's redemptive and liberating presence is being manifested. God's Kingdom and loving rule is in operation there.

Jesus indicated this when he told the crowds, "Happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.... Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right; theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, 10). God's redemptive presence is surely at work in them.

In a sense, the word *redemptive* is unnecessary in our definition because God's presence is redemptive of its very nature and the Kingdom of God is in reality *God—God insofar as God is present and at work in the created order*.

Because there is no limit to the presence of God, the Kingdom of God has no boundaries. The Kingdom may exist in the individual human heart, in groups, in institutions, in nature and in the cosmos as a whole. The Kingdom of God is as broad and as overarching as the presence of God which renews and transforms and recreates everything touched by it.

The Kingdom of God is brought about by God through Jesus and is God's gift. But it does not come about without human collaboration. It is proclaimed by the church in word and in sacrament. It is signified by the church in its very life. And it is enabled to break into the world more fully through the various efforts of the church on behalf of justice, peace and human reconciliation.

When all is said and done, the Kingdom of God is God: God insofar as God is present to us and to our world as a power that heals, that renews, that recreates, that gives life. To recognize that abiding presence of the Kingdom of God in our midst and to work always to remove obstacles to its inbreaking are our fundamental missionary responsibilities. God's gift is our task. (Excerpt from "What is the 'Kingdom of God?'" by Richard McBrien.)

Activity Plan

Introduce the activity by saying that Jesus used images that were familiar to the people of his day to communicate what God was like and the meaning of God's kingdom or reign. Use the Leader Background information to present

Ask the participants to listen carefully to each of the following parables. Show the children the item represented in the parable. After each parable pause and let the participants complete the worksheet. Families with children can work together on the worksheet.

- Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat: Matthew 13:24-30
- Parable of the Mustard Seed: Matthew 13:31-32
- Parable of the Yeast: Matthew 13:33
- Three Parables: Treasure, Pearls, Net: Matthew 13:44-52
- The Parable of the Rich Fool: Luke 12:13-21

- The Parable of the Lost Sheep: Luke 15:1-7
- The Parable of the Lost Coin: Luke 15:8-10

Review each parable and invite the participants to share their responses to the questions on the worksheet:

- Who is God in this parable?
- What does it teach us about the qualities of God?
- What does this parable teach us about the meaning of the Kingdom of God?

Give each participant a file card. Show them the everyday objects on the display. Ask each person to write one or two parables about the Kingdom of God. Tell them not to be limited by the items you have gathered. They can use their own imagination. Here are two examples:

- The Kingdom of God is like eyeglasses (or contact lens), because it allows us to see the world clearly and keeps everything in focus.
- The Kingdom of God is like a cell phone, because it allows us to be connected at all times to everyone.

Invite the participants to share some of their parables and to tell the group what the parable teaches us about God and the meaning of the Kingdom of God.

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center.

Learning Activity Center 2

Jesus Is God 's Beloved Son

This learning activity center explores two pivotal events in the life of Jesus that reveals his identity as the Son of God, the beloved and chosen one, and what it means for our life as Christians.

Scripture Focus

- Baptism of the Lord: Matthew 3:13-17 (Year A), Mark 1:7-11 (Year B), Luke 3:15-16, 21-22
- Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-9

Environment and Preparation

Set up a tent.

Cover the table in the center of the group with a white cloth. Place a large glass bowl with water and a large white candle on the table.

Place the Bible in a central place on the prayer table.

Create a display with photographs of baptism images and baptismal celebrations. Mount the photos on a foam core or poster board display.

Set up a materials table and several tables for people to create name tags or buttons.

Prepare newsprint or poster board displays with instructions for activities and the final prayer.

Materials

- See items listed under Environment and Preparation.
- Display boards: cardboard or foam core
- Newsprint or poster board, markers, masking tape
- Bible
- Pens/pencils for each participant
- Creative arts materials for making name tags or buttons: construction paper, crayons and markers, pens/pencils, scissors, safety pins, yarn or string for name tags, stickers.
- Small bowls for water blessing in groups

Leader Background

Baptism of the Lord (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:7-11, Luke 3:15-16, 21-22)

The story of Jesus' baptism is found in all four Gospels—signaling what an important event it was.

Jesus, though he was without sin, made himself one with sinners, with outcasts, with the poor in any way, to bring them God's forgiveness and life. He accepted that difficult mission. At our baptism we have become one with him. Do we too, like him, accept our mission to be good servants of God and people, even when this is a difficult task? After all, we are Jesus' disciples.

When Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize him in the Jordan, just as John had baptized other people, Jesus saw that his task was to save people from their sins. He himself was without sin, but he made himself one with the people in their weakness. And then confirmed him in his task by saying: "This is my beloved Son." When we were baptized, we expressed, through our parents and grandparents, that we had become one with Jesus. Since that day we share with Jesus in his task of serving and saving people. If we do so, then God can tell us too: "you are my beloved son or daughter."

At his baptism Jesus saw the mission ahead of him and committed himself to it. He received heaven's confirmation that the Father and the Holy Spirit were with him in his mission of saving people. At our baptism too the Father accepted us as his beloved sons and daughters and gave us the mission of living the life of Christ for all people to see.

Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-10, Luke 9:28-36

The transfiguration helps to disclose to the disciples (and us) who Jesus really is. One would think that the disciples would have had a clear idea of Jesus' identity by now; after all, they had experienced a series of feedings, water crossings, discourses and healings.

God uses this occasion of the Transfiguration to remind us to "listen." "This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests. Listen to him." The message of the voice in the cloud is the same as was given at the Baptism of Jesus in Matt. 3:13. The reaction of the disciples was fear, not so much fear of the "voice," but fear for what loomed on the horizon: possible suffering for Jesus and answering the call to follow Jesus in his sufferings.

Jesus saw ahead of him a growing opposition from the religious leaders of the people: they would kill him if he proceeded with his mission. Yet he would carry out that task, and so he went up the mountain to pray that the Father would give him courage. In the vision of the transfiguration he saw how he would rise from the dead and succeed.

The disciples see the face of Jesus change and his clothes become dazzlingly white. White garments are symbols of joy and celebration. Second, they see Moses and Elijah, two dominant prophets of the Old Testament. Both Moses and Elijah experienced God's presence on a holy mountain. Each was also anointed a prophet with the Spirit. Third, the disciples see Jesus in "glory," his authentic and ultimate status.

Activity Plan

Organize the participants into intergenerational small groups. Keep family members together (children, teens, parents, and grandparents). Write the following questions on newsprint or post board for all to see. Ask the participants to share their reflections with their group:

- *For children, teens, and adults who are not parents:* How does it feel to be loved as a son or daughter by your parents or grandparents? What does this love look like in everyday life?
- *For parents and grandparents:* What does it mean to love your children or grandchildren? What does your love look like in everyday life?

Read the stories of Baptism of Lord and the Transfiguration. Assign readers to the different characters in each story.

- Baptism of the Lord: Matthew 3:13-17 or Mark 1:7-11 or Luke 3:15-16, 21-22
- Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-9 or Mark 9:2-10 or Luke 9:28-36

Reflect on the two stories by discussing the following questions in the same intergenerational groups as the opening discussion. Write these questions on newsprint or post board for all to see. If possible, conclude the small group discussion by asking participants to share their responses to the questions. Keep it brief.

- At our Baptism we celebrate God's love for us as his children—sons and daughters. What does it feel like to be a son or daughter of God? What does God's love look like in everyday life?

Invite all of the participants to make a "I am a son/daughter of God" name tag or button. Ask them to place their name in the center of the name tag or button, followed by "a son/daughter of God," and to add several words or phrases on the name tag describing what it feels like to be a son or daughter of God. Tell them to wear their name tag or button for the rest of the program.

Provide the materials for making name tags or buttons: construction paper, crayons and markers, pens/pencils, scissors, safety pins, yarn or string for name tags, stickers. Set up a materials table and several tables for people to create name tags or buttons.

Close the session in prayer. Write the following blessing on newsprint or poster board for all to see: "(Name), you are God's chosen one. On you God's favor rests."

Ask the participants to re-join their intergenerational group. Bring each a group a small bowl of water, filled from the large bowl of water.

Explain that this final prayer is a blessing to celebrate that we are God's chosen ones. Each person is going to bless the person next to them by tracing the sign of the cross on their forehead (or hands) and saying: "(name), you are God's chosen one. On you God's favor rests."

Ask them to begin the blessing in their groups. If possible, play instrumental music in the background.

Close with the following prayer. Put the responses on newsprint or poster board.

- Leader: Let us joyfully draw water from the fountain of salvation,
Response: Let us praise God who calls us to new life.
Leader: Come to the water, all you who thirst,
Response: God alone can satisfy the thirst of every human heart.
Leader: Almighty, eternal God, when the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his Baptism in the Jordan, you revealed him as your own beloved Son. Keep us, your children born of water and the Spirit, faithful to our calling. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
Response: Amen.

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center.

Learning Activity Center 3

Jesus Heals People

This learning activity center explores what we can learn about Jesus, the Son of God, from Jesus' ministry of healing people with diseases or physical impairments.

Scripture Focus

- The Man with an Unclean Spirit: Mark 1:21-28 (4th Sunday of the Year-B)
- Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-Law: Mark 1:29-39 (5th Sunday of the Year-B)
- Jesus Cures a Deaf Man: Mark 7:31-37 (23rd Sunday of the Year-B)
- Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52 (30th Sunday of the Year-B)
- Jesus Heals the Woman with Hemorrhages: Mark 5:25-34 (13th Sunday of the Year-B)

Environment and Preparation

Develop a prayer space with a tablecloth, cross or crucifix, large white candle, and symbols of healing, such as a bowl of oil and first aid kit. Place the Bible in a central place on the prayer table.

Display pictures of people involved in healing or curing people such as doctors, nurses, and therapists on foam core or poster board.

Create display boards or newsprint sheets with the Scripture reflection questions.

Materials

- See items listed under Environment and Preparation.
- Display boards: cardboard or foam core
- Newsprint or poster board, markers, masking tape
- Bible
- Paper, pens/pencils for each participant
- Paper, crayons, and marking pens for children
- Newsprint, markers, masking tape
- Colored file cards
- Basket to collect prayer cards

Leader Background

Jesus is a man of care and compassion. His care makes him hyper-attentive to what people say and do, fuels an unrelenting passion to heal, urges him to compassionately share the blessings and curses of being human, promotes the courage of unlimited forgiveness, and engenders an anger which is not righteous but the way great love grieves. These qualities comprise Jesus' capacity to care.

Jesus is attentive to the people around him. He notices short people in tall trees (See Luke 19:1-10), the humble, furtive hand of a widow by the coffer (Mark 12:41), the hunger of a twelve year old girl come back from the dead (Mark 5:43), unimportant street children shoved away (Mark 9:13), a cry for pity from the perimeter of the crown (Mark 10:46-52), and a touch on his cloak that is different from all the rest, a touch which communicates a little more panic, a little more pleading, a touch of twelve years' bleeding (Mark 5:31).

Jesus embraces both the joy and the pain of life. He celebrates and cries; he rejoices and is angry. His care makes him receive each moment as if it were the only moment. He does not suffer from world-weariness. This sensitivity to everything as new was part of Jesus' make-up. Every time he breathed in, he was conscious that God had breathed out. At every moment everything came from the love of God.

Compassion is the experience of feeling the other's life as one's own. Three of Jesus' most powerful stories turn on the experience of compassion. The Samaritan looks on the man in the ditch with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Luke 10:25-37). The Father looks at his son with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Luke 15:11-31). The king looks on the servant with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Mt. 18:21-35).

Compassion is the feeling-perception which emerges from the empathic center where God, the self, and the neighbor join. It is so great that it does not stop at the feeling of solidarity but galvanizes the person into works of solidarity. Jesus feels and acts out of compassion when he sees the sick (Matthew 14:14), meets hungry people (Matthew 15:32; Mk 8:11), when a leper petitions him (Mark 1:41), and when he sees a widow walking in the funeral procession of her son (Luke 7:13).

Jesus' care moves him to heal. A leper says to Jesus, "If you will to do it, you can cure me." Jesus responds, "Of course, I will it!" Everything rides on his "Of course." The leper and Jesus share the same concern—his wellbeing. The overflow of care into the desire to heal suffuses the portrait of Jesus. He is pictured as a man seeking out the sick and possessed. But, once word gets out, they seek him out. Often someone comes to him with a request to come and heal or exorcise someone he or she loves. In the end, Jesus is waiting for people to heal them. While they were looking for him, he was seeking them.

(Adapted and excerpted from *Spirit Master* by John Shea.)

Activity Plan

Introduce the activity by explaining the importance of Jesus' ministry of healing using the Leader Background information.

Guide the participants through the following process to help them "get inside" the Gospel stories of Jesus' healing ministry. Review the questions with the group so that they are prepared to listen attentively to the Gospel story. Write questions on a sheet of newsprint or poster board for all to see. Use *two* of the following stories:

- The Man with an Unclean Spirit: Mark 1:21-28
- Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-Law: Mark 1:29-39
- Jesus Cures a Deaf Man: Mark 7:31-37
- Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52
- Jesus Heals the Woman with Hemorrhages: Mark 5:25-34

Slowly read the first Gospel story of healing. Ask everyone to step into the story and become a part of it.

Re-read the story stopping frequently to invite the participants to answer the questions below. Write the questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see. Participants may want to write their observations on paper each time you pause in telling the story. Children may want to draw a picture of the story they are hearing.

- What is Jesus doing? What does he say? What is happening to Jesus?
- What is the person Jesus meets saying or doing?
- How would you feel if you were the person in the story being healed by Jesus? What would you have done or said to him? to others?

Proceed with the second Gospel story in the same way.

Invite the participants to share their personal feelings and thoughts about the Gospel using the three questions above. (If you have a large group, divide people into small intergenerational groups. Keep all family members together.)

Discuss the following questions, in small intergenerational groups or the large group (depending on the size of the group). Write these questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see. Then invite people to present summary statements.

- Why do you think healing people is so important to Jesus?
- What is Jesus teaching us about the qualities of God through his ministry of healing? Name those qualities.

Distribute file cards to people, giving families several cards. Ask people to write a prayer for someone who is sick or suffers from a physical impairment. Collect the cards and put them in the prayer basket. The prayer basket will be brought forward at the closing prayer service.

Close in prayer.

God of all consolation, you chose and sent your Son to heal the world. Graciously listen to our prayers of faith for those who are sick or suffer physical impairments. Send the power of your Holy Spirit to strengthen and heal all of us in body, soul, and spirit. Amen.

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center.

Learning Activity Center 4

Jesus Forgives Sin

This learning activity center explores what we can learn about Jesus, the Son of God, from Jesus' ministry of forgiveness.

Scripture Focus

- Woman Caught in Adultery: John 8:1-11 (5th Sunday of Lent-C)
- Healing and Forgiving Sins: Mark 2:1-12 (7th Sunday of the Year-B)

Environment and Preparation

Develop a prayer space with a tablecloth, cross or crucifix, large white candle, a mat (large straw door mat), and several large stones. Place the Bible in a central place on the prayer table.

Create a display with pictures of people involved in forgiving others and/or in efforts at reconciliation. Present the photos on a foam core or poster board display.

Create display boards or newsprint sheets with reflection questions.

Select a narrator and actors for the Gospel reading from Mark 2:1-12 (see script for list of characters).

Provide a copy of the script to the actors.

Rehearse the drama with the primary actors prior to the program.

Materials

- See items listed under Environment and Preparation.
- Display boards: cardboard or foam core
- Newsprint or poster board, markers, masking tape
- Bible
- A mat for the paralytic man
- Stones for each participant: Purchase stones with a flat edge so that people can write one or two words on the front and back side of the stone (Use file cards if you have difficulty finding flat edge stones. Each person still needs a stone to hold.)
- Black felt tipped markers (fine point for writing on stones)
- Paper, pens/pencils for each participant
- Paper, crayons, and marking pens for children
- Newsprint or poster board, markers, masking tape
- Colored file cards
- Basket to collect prayer cards

Leader Background

Jesus is a man of care and compassion. His care makes him hyper-attentive to what people say and do, fuels an unrelenting passion to heal, urges him to compassionately share the blessings and curses of being human, promotes the courage of unlimited forgiveness, and engenders an anger

which is not righteous but the way great love grieves. These qualities comprise Jesus' capacity to care.

Jesus is attentive to the people around him. He notices short people in tall trees (See Luke 19:1-10), the humble, furtive hand of a widow by the coffer (Mark 12:41), the hunger of a twelve year old girl come back from the dead (Mark 5:43), unimportant street children shoved away (Mark 9:13), a cry for pity from the perimeter of the crown (Mark 10:46-52), and a touch on his cloak that is different from all the rest, a touch which communicates a little more panic, a little more pleading, a touch of twelve years' bleeding (Mark 5:31).

Jesus embraces both the joy and the pain of life. He celebrates and cries; he rejoices and is angry. His care makes him receive each moment as if it were the only moment. He does not suffer from world-weariness. This sensitivity to everything as new was part of Jesus' make-up. Every time he breathed in, he was conscious that God had breathed out. At every moment everything came from the love of God.

Compassion is the experience of feeling the other's life as one's own. Three of Jesus' most powerful stories turn on the experience of compassion. The Samaritan looks on the man in the ditch with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Luke 10:25-37). The Father looks at his son with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Luke 15:11-31). The king looks on the servant with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Mt. 18:21-35).

Compassion is the feeling-perception which emerges from the empathic center where God, the self, and the neighbor join. It is so great that it does not stop at the feeling of solidarity but galvanizes the person into works of solidarity. Jesus feels and acts out of compassion when he sees the sick (Matthew 14:14), meets hungry people (Matthew 15:32; Mk 8:11), when a leper petitions him (Mark 1:41), and when he sees a widow walking in the funeral procession of her son (Luke 7:13).

Jesus' compassion moves him to forgive. In the stories of Jesus there is a very close link between compassion and forgiveness. In the three stories where compassion is the inner experience of the characters, the outer expression is forgiveness. Once the prodigal father and the king experience compassion, they are moved to forgive the son and the servant; and the lawyer who heard the story of the compassionate Samaritan construes his action not merely in terms of help but in terms of mercy. Since it is assumed that the man in the ditch is a Jew, and more precisely, is the listening lawyer himself, the Samaritan has to overcome the history of hostility between them. His care flows from his ability to forgive and to get beyond racial hatred. It must be stressed that the father, the king, and the Samaritan have been wronged by the people they forgive and help. There is something in the experience of compassion that facilitates the most difficult and yet the most creative of all human actions—heartfelt forgiveness.

In the Gospel portrait Jesus' stories and teaching about forgiveness are matched by his actions. He forgives his disciples and those who crucified him. His major emphasis is to offer divine forgiveness to all who have sinned. It is this experience of divine compassion and forgiveness mediated through Jesus which is the energy of inter-human forgiveness (see Luke 6:36-38). Jesus hoped to initiate a spirit of forgiveness just as self-perpetuating as the spiral of violence.

(Adapted and excerpted from *Spirit Master* by John Shea.)

Activity Plan

Introduce the activity by explaining the importance of Jesus' ministry of forgiveness using the Leader Background information.

Present the first Gospel story: Mark 2:1-12. This story lends itself to a dramatic presentation. Consider role playing this Gospel story with actors playing the parts or simply doing a dramatic reading. See the dramatic presentation of the Mark 2:1-12 after the activity plan (p. x).

Give each participant a stone. Ask them to hold it tightly during the reading of the Gospel story. Read the story of the Woman Caught in Adultery in John 8:1-11.

Give each person a marking pen. Ask the participants to think of one "negative" quality (sin) in their life that they want Jesus to forgive, e.g., dishonesty, judging others, anger, indifference, disrespect, arrogance. Write this word on one side of the stone or file card. Parents can write the word for small children.

Tell the participants to think of one gift (quality, trait, strength) that want to ask Jesus to give them so that they can live their life more faithfully as his followers. Write this word on the other side of the stone or file card.

Discuss the following questions. Write these questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see. Then invite people to present summary statements.

- What does it mean to believe in a God who forgives us?
- What is Jesus teaching us about the qualities of God through his ministry of forgiveness? Name those qualities.

Close in prayer. Remind people to keep their stones and to pray regularly for Jesus' forgiveness and for the strength to overcome sin.

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance,
to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads to sin.

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center.

Jesus Heals and Forgives Sins (Mark 2:1-12)

Roles

- Narrator
- Jesus
- Paralytic Man
- Four people carrying the Paralytic Man
- Scribes (several people)
- Crowd (Write the lines on newsprint or poster board for all to see.)

Script

Narrator: When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.

(Enter four men and the paralytic man.)

Narrator: And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic

Jesus: Son, your sins are forgiven.

Narrator: Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts . . .

Scribes: Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?

Narrator: At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves.

Jesus: Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and take your mat and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (turning to the paralytic), I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.

(Paralytic man rises with his mat.)

Narrator: And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God

Crowd (all participants): We have never seen anything like this!

Learning Activity Center 5

Jesus Raises People from the Dead

This learning activity center explores what we can learn about Jesus, the Son of God, from three Gospel stories of Jesus raising people from the dead.

Scripture Focus

- Raising the Son of the Widow of Nain: Luke 7:11-17 (10th Sunday of the Year-C)
- Raising Jairus' Daughter: Mark 5:21-43 (13th Sunday of the Year-B)
- Raising Lazarus from the Dead: John 11:1-45 (5th Sunday of Lent-A)

Environment and Preparation

Develop a prayer space with a tablecloth, crucifix with a white stole draped over it, and Paschal Candle. Place the Bible in a central place on the prayer table.

Set the scene for each Gospel story you dramatize, e.g., a tomb for the Lazarus story, a stretcher for the son of the widow of Nain, a bed for the daughter of Jairus.

Select your Gospel story(s). You will have time for the story of Lazarus *or* the other two Gospel stories.

- Raising the Son of the Widow of Nain: Luke 7:11-17
- Raising Jairus' Daughter: Mark 5:21-43
- Raising Lazarus from the Dead: John 11:17-44

Select a narrator and actors (see script for list of characters). Provide a copy of the script to the actors.

Develop costumes for each of the actors. Dress the actors in the first century, Middle East clothing. Rehearse the drama with the primary actors prior to the program.

Design props, such as a tomb for Lazarus, a stretcher to carry the son of the widow of Nain or the daughter of Jairus.

Record the dramatic presentations so they can be used in other programming (optional).

Use a separate room for the drama so you don't disrupt the other learning activity centers.

Give each person a white stole to wear as a symbol of the resurrection. Purchase white cloth (sheets) and cut-out stoles in varying lengths for people to wear. (You can also purchase white cloth cut into strips.)

Materials

- See items listed under Environment and Preparation.
- Display boards: cardboard or foam core
- Newsprint or poster board, markers, masking tape

- Bible
- Crayons and colored marking pens
- White cloth cut into stoles of varying sizes
- Video camcorder to record the dramatic presentations (optional)

Leader Background

Luke 7:11-17

As the biblical books of Proverbs and Sirach illustrate, women in the Mediterranean world were always under the care of a key man in their lives: father, brother, husband, or son. While women had enormous power in the Mediterranean world, they wielded it differently and in different spheres than men did.

A widow was particularly vulnerable. She had already lost the primary male obliged to look after her. Now the widow of Nain had lost her only son, her only source of support and her last connection to her husband's family.

The son was dead but so too was his mother. Without any significant male in her life to take care of her, this woman was as good as dead in her society. Though she still possessed physical life, it had no meaning.

Jesus was moved to compassion by the sight of this widow following her only son's bier. This compassion led to action. He raised the boy and presented him to his mother.

Healing was understood in antiquity as the restoration of meaning to life. The widowed mother, who had lost her son, lost everything of value in her world. Even her life lost meaning. But now to have her son restored by Jesus was to have been given a new lease on meaningful life in that world.

John 11:1-45

The raising of Lazarus gave the Jewish leaders their reason to plot Jesus' demise and gives us an insight into the significance of Jesus' triumph over death. In Palestine burial took place on the day of death. Grieving followed the burial, for at least a week, possibly lasting as long as a month. Wailing and loud expressions of sorrow accompanied the grieving.

Jesus heard of the death of his friend, Lazarus, yet did not rush to be with Mary and Martha. When the time comes to be with them, the disciples protested. If he returned to Judea the Jews would surely kill him. When Jesus did finally arrive at the mourning scene, Martha met him with "If you had been here, my brother would never have died." When the mourners saw Jesus weep at the tomb of his friend, they reacted with "See how much he loved him!" Others scoffed and wondered, "If he opened the eyes of the blind man, why couldn't he have stopped death from taking Lazarus?"

Reaction to the miracle was also mixed. On one side there was belief: "Many of the Jews who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him." But others reported to the Pharisees, where the Council was gathered together to consider the implications of Jesus' signs. The Jews were fearful. Jesus was successful and this was a problem and a threat to the Jewish system of worship and national identity. Something had to be done to stop him. As a result of this plot against him, Jesus left Judea with his disciples and went to Ephraim in the country near the wilderness.

In John's community, a crisis of faith took place when any believer died. Jesus promised eternal life. "Whoever believes in me will live (will be raised to eternal life) even though he dies (physical death)." Yet humans continued to die. If only Jesus had not left at his Ascension, he would still be with the community, and believers would not die. Jesus had asked the Father to raise Lazarus, why not ask the Father to raise these believers?

The Jesus of John's Gospel must correct a misunderstanding. While he is indeed "the resurrection and the life," it does not mean the restoration of life to a corpse. It entails rather a transformation of life. The eternal life that Jesus gives does not abolish death but rather transcends it.

Martha and Mary, along with their relatives and friends, had been hoping that Jesus might have cured Lazarus before he died. Although they were disappointed, they still put their trust in him. Jesus himself, filled with sorrow at the death of his friend Lazarus, restores him to life again. One day he and all who believe in Christ will share in a life that will never end.

Mark 5:21-43

In this Gospel story Mark makes sure we not only see a Jesus who has the power to heal but also displays a very human compassionate side. Besides being concerned for the well being of the children, Mark shows Jesus' concern that the child be given something to eat. This very human aspect made Jesus, the healer, very approachable. Jesus does not hesitate when faced with the request come and heal the girl. His compassion and concern for all those in need is evident.

Activity Plan

Introduce the first Gospel story and its setting and actors. (If you chose the Raising of Lazarus, it will be your only Gospel story.)

Present the dramatic enactment of the first Gospel story.

Discuss the following questions, in small intergenerational groups or the large group (depending on the size of the group). Adapt the questions to the particular Gospel story. Write these questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see.

- How would you feel and what would you say to Jesus if you were . . .
 - a person in the crowd watching?
 - the family member (Martha and Mary, the widow of Nain—mother of the son, Jairus—the father of the daughter)?
 - the person who is raised to life (Lazarus, the son, the daughter)?
- What does it mean to believe in a God who raises people to life after death?
- What is Jesus teaching us about the qualities of God through these Gospel stories? Name those qualities.

Conduct the second Gospel story in the same manner if you did not choose the Raising of Lazarus.

Read the remaining story(s) to the group. You can do it as a dramatic reading (see script).

Give each person a white stole to wear as a symbol of the resurrection. If there is time, people can personalize their stole with a symbol representing the stories or the meaning of resurrection.

Discuss the following questions. Write these questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see. Then invite people to present summary statements.

- Why do you think raising people from the dead is so important to Jesus?
- What is Jesus teaching us about the qualities of God through these three stories of raising people from the dead? Name those qualities.

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center.

The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:17-44)

Roles

- Narrator
- Martha
- Mary
- Lazarus
- Jesus
- Neighbors (Use participants for this role. Write their lines on newsprint for all to see.)

Script

Narrator: When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

Martha: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him

Jesus: Your brother will rise again.

Martha: I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Jesus: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

Martha: Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.

Narrator: When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary.

Martha: The Teacher is here and is calling for you.'

Narrator: And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet.

Mary: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

Jesus: Where have you laid him?

Mary and Martha: Lord, come and see.

(Jesus begins to weep.)

Neighbors: See how he loved him! Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

Narrator: Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

Jesus: Take away the stone.

Martha: Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.

Jesus: Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?

(Take away the stone or open the tomb.)

Jesus (looking upwards): Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.

Jesus (with a loud voice): Lazarus, come out!

(Lazarus comes out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.)

Jesus: Unbind him, and let him go.

Raising the Son of the Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)

Roles

- Narrator
- Jesus
- Son (on a stretcher)
- Mother (Widow of Nain)
- People in funeral procession (Use participants for this role.)

Script

Narrator: Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town.

(Funeral parade with dead son on a stretcher and mother weeping.)

Narrator: When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her.

Jesus: Do not weep.

(Jesus comes forward and touches the bier, as the bearers stand still.)

Jesus (in a loud voice): Young man, I say to you, rise!

(Dead man sits up and begins to speak, and Jesus gives him back to his mother.)

Narrator: Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God.

Crowd: A great prophet has risen among us! and God has looked favorably on his people!

Narrator: This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Raising Jairus' Daughter (Mark 5:21-43)

Roles

- Narrator
- Jesus
- Jairus
- Daughter (on a bed)
- People at Jairus' house (Use participants for this role. Write their lines on newsprint for all to see.)
- Peter, James, John (Use participants for this role.)

Script

Narrator: When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet.

Jairus (in a begging voice): My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.'

Narrator: So he went with him. Soon, some people from the Jairus' house met them.

People from the House: Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?

Jesus: Do not fear, only believe.

Narrator: He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

Jesus (upon entering the house): Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.'

Narrator: And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was.

Jesus (taking the girl by her hand): Little girl, get up!

(Immediately the girl gets up and begins to walk about. The father and mother, as well as the disciples and the people at the house, are overcome with amazement.)

Jesus: Tell no one about know this. Now, give her something to eat.

Activity Center 6

Jesus Feeds People

This learning activity center explores what we can learn about Jesus, the Son of God and Bread of Life, from the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

Scripture Focus

- Loaves and fishes: Matthew 14:13-21, John 6:1-15, Luke 9:11-17
- God gives you true bread: John 6:24-35
- I am the Bread of Life: John 6:41-51
- Eat my flesh; drink my blood: John 6:51-58

Environment and Preparation

Develop a prayer space with a tablecloth, five loaves of bread in baskets, and two dried fish. Place the Bible in a central place on the prayer table.

Create a display with pictures of people from around the world eating. Place a photo of people at Mass and receiving communion at the center of the display. Present the photos on a foam core or poster board display.

Purchase two dried fish and five loaves of wheat or whole grain bread. Place each loaf of bread in a basket. You will need five loaves of bread each time you conduct the learning activity center.

Create display boards or newsprint sheets with reflection questions.

Select readers for the Gospel story.

Make copies of the “Bread of Life” placemat for each participant on 8.5x11 card stock paper (white or a light color). The paper will be folded in half to create a table tent.

Materials

- See items listed under Environment and Preparation.
- Display boards: cardboard or foam core
- Newsprint or poster board, markers, masking tape
- A Bible for each reader
- Paper, pens/pencils for each participant
- Paper, crayons, and marking pens for children

Leader Background

It is late evening, “dinnertime.” While the disciples ask Jesus to send the people away, Jesus makes the disciples understand that he expects them to feed the crowd. And where are the disciples to get the food? Someone has five loaves and two fish. There is no real significance to the numbers of five and two but the combination of bread and fish is interesting.

The diet of the first century consisted of a few basic staples, with other items depending on the availability and expense. Of the three staple commodities—grain, oil and wine—by far the most

important staple was grain and the products made from it. Bread constituted one-half of the caloric intake in much of the ancient Mediterranean region (just as it does today). Wheat was considered much superior to barley, hence barley (and sorghum) bread was the staple for the poor and slaves.

Meats and poultry were always considered desirable but were expensive and thus rare for the peasants. The majority ate them only on feast days or holidays, though temple priests ate them in abundance.

In the first century, fish was highly desirable and was a typical Sabbath dish. Despite considerable effort to obtain it even by the poor, fish was widely available only near the Mediterranean coast and the Sea of Galilee. Brining it was the means of preservation.

When the loaves of bread and dried fish are presented to Jesus, he performs the role of the father at a typical Jewish meal. He looks up to heaven and pronounces the traditional Jewish blessing before meals: "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." The blessing is followed by the breaking of the bread and the distribution of the pieces.

Thus the banquet over which Jesus presides is reminiscent of God's feeding of Israel in the wilderness and Elisha's miraculous feeding of one hundred men in 2 Kings 4:42-44.

The story of this miraculous feeding illustrates God's extravagance toward those in need. Not only is the miracle an indication of Jesus' compassion to those in need. It is also a sign of the future Reign of God which will be like a banquet where all will be satisfied.

As Jesus feeds the 5000 and satisfies their hunger, so he continues to nourish us and satisfy all the hungers of the human heart. In a symbolic way, the feeding of the 5000 stands as testimony to the many ways Jesus satisfies us.

Jesus insisted that his disciples be his instruments. "Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?" In the end, Jesus took the five loaves and two fishes and "gave them to his disciples for distribution to the crowd." Jesus fed the crowds *through* them. One obvious lesson here is that we continue to be the hands of Christ feeding the world. We who are his disciples share in that work of feeding those who hunger.

Luke frequently portrays Jesus having a meal with his disciples. Meals were signs of special intimacy. Jesus desires to become an intimate part of the lives of those in this vast crowd of people. Today, the Eucharist is that sign of God's intimacy and continual nourishment of the Church.

Activity Plan

Select the Gospel story: Matthew 14:13-21, John 6:1-15, or Luke 9:11-17.

Present the story of the loaves and fishes. The story lends itself to a dramatic reading using several readers to represent the people in the story. Gather all of the people around the table with the five loaves of bread in baskets (make sure it is a wheat or whole grain bread). Begin reading the Gospel story. When you get to the part of the story where Jesus feeds the people, send team members among the participants distributing the loaves of bread. Ask them to pass the bread and each take a piece of

bread and eat it. Play quiet instrumental music in the background while people are eating. When everyone has eaten, the team members can collect the extra food in a basket. Then conclude the story.

Discuss the following questions. Write these questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see.

- How do you think the people in the crowd felt? Name the feelings.
- How did the apostles of Jesus want to handle the situation?
- How did Jesus choose to handle the situation? Why do you think Jesus acted this way?

Use the Leader Background information to present several reflections on the importance of the story of the Loaves and Fishes, emphasizing how Jesus satisfies our hungers, how we are called to continue feeding people, and how the Eucharist is the way Jesus continues to nourish us today.

Guide the participants in creating a “Jesus, Bread of Life” table prayer using a table tent format. Distribute copies of the table tent handout to every parent, teen, and adult participant. Families can create one table prayer for each child.

Use questions such as those listed below to help families write their table prayers. Share the examples of table prayers with the group. Write the questions and a sample prayer on newsprint or poster board for all to see. People can decorate their table tent with a symbol or picture.

- Lord Jesus we are grateful for . . .
- Jesus, Bread of Life, you nourish us by . . .
- Jesus, Servant to all, we pray for those in need . . .

Here are several examples of table prayers:

Lord Jesus, you continue to bless us with so much. We thank you for the companions gathered at this table – may we be as nourished through sharing time together as we are in sharing food together. Bless the food that sits before us—may it feed our bodies and nurture us to give what we have to those who have less. Amen.

Lord Jesus, Bread of Life, we are grateful as we pause before this meal, for all the blessings of life that you give to us. Daily, we are fed with good things, nourished by friendship and care, feasted with forgiveness and understanding. And so, mindful of your continuous care, we pause to be grateful for the blessings of this table. (*Pause for silent reflection*) May your presence be the “extra” taste to this meal. Amen

Lord Jesus, you feed every living thing. We gather to eat together at this table; keep us in your love. Give us true concern for the least of our sisters and brothers, so that as we gladly share our food with them, we may also sit down together with them at the table of the kingdom of heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Invite several participants to share their table prayer with the entire group. Remind the participants to make their table prayer a regular part of their meal ritual.

Discuss the following questions. Write these questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see. Then invite people to present summary statements.

- What does it mean to believe in a God who feeds/nourishes people?
- What is Jesus teaching us about the qualities of God through the story of the loaves and fishes? Name those qualities.

Conclude by giving each adult participant the recipe for baking bread and challenge them to spend time in the next week or two baking bread and reflecting on the story of the loaves and fishes. Challenge them to consider collecting food from their home and donating it to the local food bank or soup kitchen as a way to live out the story of the loaves and fishes.

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center.

Activity Center 7

Jesus Is Born

This activity explores what we can learn about Jesus, the Son of God, from the Infancy Narratives.

Scripture Focus

- Luke 2:1-14 and Luke 2:15-20
- Luke 2:22-40
- Matthew 2:1-12

Special Note

There are three learning activity centers designs: the Birth of Jesus, the Presentation in the Temple, and the Visit of the Magi. Each activity center is approximately 20 minutes in length. You can conduct all three learning centers as a one-hour experience, conduct the three learning centers in sequence with people attending one or more centers, or select one center. There will be time in the program to repeat each learning activity center twice.

Environment and Preparation

Develop a prayer space with Christmas symbols and a nativity scene. Place the Bible, an oil lamp, gold, expensive perfume, and aromatherapy oil in a central place on the prayer table.

Conduct this session in a separate room so that you can show the video.

Consider developing two video learning activity centers: one for families with children and one for adolescents and adults. Obtain one or both of the videos:

The First Christmas. This colorful, animated production of “The First Christmas” is narrated by Christopher Plummer. It tells the traditional story of the birth of Jesus, beginning with Mary and Joseph’s trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Viewers witness their encounter with the innkeeper who “has no room for them,” but provides shelter in a stable where Mary gives birth. Viewers see the announcement to the shepherds and follow the Magi who trek across the desert guided by the mysterious star. Rebecca, the innkeeper’s daughter, and Daniel, the shepherd boy, provide a strong supporting cast. And finally, the mood is enhanced by colloquial dialogue and familiar music in the background. This video is the winner of the 1999 Crown Award for the best children’s video. (Available for purchase from Vision Video or USCCB Publishing.)

Jesus of Nazareth. The first hour of this film is devoted the story of Jesus’ birth.

Preview the video you have selected. If you are using *The First Christmas*, identify where to stop the video for each of the three sections of the learning activity plan. If you are using the *Jesus of Nazareth*, try to move easily from one scene to the next.

Write the instructions, discussion questions, and prayers on newsprint or poster board for all to see.

Materials

- Bible
- Projection equipment
- Crayons and colored markers
- Large green and/or red file cards in Activity 1
- Oil lamp in Activity 2
- Candle for each family and individual participant in Activity 2
- Small gift box for each family and individual participant in Activity 3
- Stickers for gift boxes in Activity 3

Leader Background

In a very real way, then, the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke are like mini-Gospels. They contain the basic revelation of the full identity of Jesus, and the way in which this revelation was shared, evangelizing some, but causing rejection and hatred among others.”

...we find a clear emphasis on the conception and birth of the Savior King of the House of David and God’s unique Son. This identity of Jesus is splendidly set in the context of the Old Testament echoes, to show that the God who is acting through Jesus behaves consistently with the way the God of Israel has acted in the past.

The gospels of Luke and Matthew proclaim Jesus’ identity in an altogether different way from Mark and John. They begin with stories of Jesus’ birth and events surrounding it. These accounts are referred to as the infancy narratives. They tell us that Jesus came into the world the way all humans do, born of a woman after having been carried in her womb for many months.

Paying attention to his birth gives special emphasis to the fact that Jesus participated in the human condition. He lived and breathed, cried and smiled, slept and ate, laughed and sang, and brought his parents joy and heartache.

The infancy narratives also tell us that Jesus was no ordinary human being. They announce Jesus’ unique identity. They tell of Jesus being conceived in Mary’s womb through the Holy Spirit. Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts are quite different from one another but despite these differences both have the same intent—to announce Jesus’ unique relationship with God and the Spirit and his divine and human identity.

The Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 1:1-2:23)

In this gospel, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and announces that the child in Mary’s womb was conceived through the Holy Spirit. The angel tells Joseph that the baby is a boy and instructs him to name the baby Jesus, which means “God saves,” because this child will save people from sin.

After Jesus is born in Bethlehem the magi from the east see his star rising. They set out following the star until it stops at the place where Jesus is. They pay him homage and present gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. In the course of their journey they encounter King Herod and inadvertently put Jesus in danger. An angel appears again to Joseph to warn him that Herod intends to destroy

Jesus so he flees with his family to Egypt. After Herod's death an angel appears yet again to Joseph to tell him it is safe to return to Israel. They return and settle in the town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee because they are afraid to go back to Judea.

The Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:5-2:40)

In this account an angel appears to Mary in Nazareth to announce that she will conceive and bear a son. The angel says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Mary responds, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

While pregnant, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant. When Mary greets her cousin, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. This story element is a sign that the child in Mary's womb has a special divine identity. Elizabeth cries out "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb " and addresses Mary as "the Mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:42-43).

The time for Jesus' birth coincided with a census that required Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. There was no room for them in the inn so, as Luke recounts, Mary wraps Jesus in swaddling clothes and lays him in a manger, which is a feeding trough for animals. An angel appears to shepherds keeping watch over their flock nearby and announces the birth of the savior and messiah. The shepherds quickly go to visit the newborn and to share the message they received from the angels about who this baby is. After Mary and Joseph present Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem, they return home to Nazareth in Galilee.

Different Accounts, Same Message

These brief summaries illustrate striking differences between the two gospels. Even if you read the full accounts for yourself, you will see that it is impossible to reconcile the discrepancies. This is understandable since both authors wrote nearly a century after Jesus' birth and relied on the oral traditions of different Christian communities.

But there is another reason for some of the differences. Both writers crafted unique story elements to convey the Christians' post-resurrection belief that Jesus is divine. In other words, the narratives are stories written primarily to show theological meanings rather than to report historical events.

The summaries also show that the two gospels share a common thread, which is significant since Matthew and Luke were apparently unfamiliar with each other's narratives. Jesus was born in Bethlehem after having been conceived by the Spirit, and his parents were Mary and Joseph. The different ways the narratives unfold is not the important thing. The value of these accounts is not the degree of their historical veracity.

Rather, they are significant because they say something true about who Jesus is. He was born as a result of human and divine cooperation. He is a human being and he is God, at the same time. Through Jesus, God became human and came to dwell among us so that we might share in the communion of love that characterizes God's life.

Scripture Activity 1: The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-21)

Introduce the film by using the words below or your own words.

The story of the birth of Jesus is full of action: Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem, looking for a place to stay, shepherds coming to visit . . . and it is full of symbols and images: stars, angels, manger, and so forth. Let's see and hear the story . . .

Show the birth of Christ from the film *The First Christmas* or *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Alternative 1: Gospel Reading

If the film presentation is not an option you can read Luke 2:1-20 or use one of the dramatic readings from Alternative 2.

Alternative 2: Dramatization and Storytelling

You can dramatize or present a creative reading of the birth of Jesus. Go online to find dramatic readings. Organize the participants into intergenerational groups, keeping family members together. Invite the participants to put themselves into the story by asking them to do the following:

Put yourself back 2,000 years. If you could be a person, place, or thing that was a part of the story of Jesus' birth, who or what would you be: angel, shepherd, Mary, Joseph, innkeeper, sheep, star, the donkey carrying Mary to Bethlehem? Why?

Describe what you experienced (saw, heard, touched, tasted, smelled) from the perspective of the person, place, or thing you chose. For example, if you were the star, what would you have seen and heard? If you were a shepherd, describe the night of Jesus' birth: What did you see? Where were you? What did you hear? What did you and your friends talk about?

Ask the participants to write Jesus' birth announcement by completing the following question. Families with children should work together. Give people a green or red file card to write the birth announcement.

If you had to write Jesus' birth announcement today, what would you say to announce his arrival? What important information would you include?

Ask for volunteers to read their announcement to the group.

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center. (If you are doing more than one of the Infancy Narrative learning activity centers, conclude the entire session with the journal activity.)

Scripture Activity 2. Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22-40)

Show the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple from the film *The First Christmas* or *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Alternative 1: Gospel Reading

If the film presentation is not an option, you can read Luke 2:22-40 or use one of the dramatic readings from Alternative 2.

Alternative 2: Dramatization and Storytelling

You can dramatize or present a creative reading of the birth of Jesus. Go online to look for dramatic readings.

Organize the participants into intergenerational groups, keeping family members together. Invite the participants to put themselves into the story by asking them to discuss the following:

- When Simeon saw Jesus he proclaimed that Jesus was a light for all nations. In his life Jesus showed he was light for the world. How was Jesus a light for all people? What did he do that brought light to the world?

Share with the participants the following reflections by using the words below or your own words.

On Christmas Day we heard a reading from the prophet Isaiah . . .

“The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest . . .” (Isaiah 9:2-3)

When Simeon saw Jesus he proclaimed that Jesus was a light for all nations. In his life Jesus showed he was light for the world: He brought light into darkness when he...

- healed those who were suffering or ill
- taught people how to live as God’s children
- forgave sinners
- served those in need—the poor, the homeless, the hungry
- offered hope to those without a future or reason to live
- loved all people, especially those that who were the most unloved

Read Matthew 5:14-16.

Explain the passage from the Gospel of Matthew by using the words below or your own words.

Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world. In Jesus' day, anyone who entered the single room house would immediately see a light-stand. These lamps gave out very dim light, something like the night lights we might use in our bedrooms. Even your candle gives out more light than the oil lamps of Jesus' day. Because of the smallness of these one-room houses and in order not to fill the house with smoke and fumes, one placed a bushel over the lamp in order to extinguish the flame.

By telling his followers to be light to the world, Jesus challenged them to push away the darkness. They were to give witness to him even in the face of opposition, detraction, and even persecution.

Jesus wants his disciples to continue his presence in the world. Just as he has been a light that leads and guides other to the truth, so are they.

Ask each person or family to make a commitment to be light for the world by completing the handout, "We Are Light for the World." Ask people to think of the ways they can be light for world in their families, church, community, and in the world. Each family or individual should develop five or six specific ways they can be light for the world. After people have completed the activity ask for volunteers to share ways they are going to be light for the world.

Distribute candles to each family and single participant. When the participants have their candles, pray together: *Lord, Jesus give us the strength and grace to bring your light into the darkness of our world. May our good works show people that you are truly alive today.*

Note: If you conduct this activity during the Christmas season ask the participants to light their candle each day from Christmas Day through Epiphany Sunday and pray the short prayer.

Discuss in intergenerational groups:

- What does the story of Jesus' Presentation in the Temple teach us about his divinity as the Son of God?

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center. (If you are doing more than one of the Infancy Narrative learning activity centers, conclude the entire session with the journal activity.)

Scripture Activity 3 Epiphany—The Visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)

Show the visit of the Magi from the film *The First Christmas* or *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Alternative 1: Gospel Reading

If the film presentation is not an option, you can read Matthew 2:1-12 or use one of the dramatic readings from Alternative 2.

Alternative 2: Dramatization and Storytelling

You can dramatize or present a creative reading of the birth of Jesus. Go online to find dramatic readings.

Explain to the group the following reflection on the gifts of the Magi by using the words below or your own words.

The three wise men brought gifts to Jesus, but each of them brought a different type of gift. One brought gold which was an extravagant gift worthy of a king, one brought frankincense which was a valuable powder burned to make a sweet smell, and one brought myrrh which was a perfume used at burial.

Organize the participants into intergenerational groups, keeping family members together. Introduce the three discussion questions below and give several examples for each question. Write these questions on newsprint or poster board for all to see. Ask groups to share their responses to each question.

- *What are some gifts God gives us?* (Examples: love; parents and family, Jesus, creation, animals, sunshine, our talents)
- *What are some gifts we can give God?* (Examples: love, prayers of praise and thanksgiving, helping others, respecting all people, caring for our world, serving those in need, keeping the 10 commandments, worshipping every Sunday)
- *What are some gifts we can give others?* (Examples: love, our time, playing with a brother or sister, writing a letter to grandparents, helping with chores, praying for the needs of others, helping those in need)

Ask each family and individual participant to complete the four gift coupons, writing their answers on the handout. (Be sure to cut-out the coupons in advance.)

- Gift 1: A gift we can give to God . . .
- Gift 2: A gift we can give to each other as family members . . .
- Gift 3: A gift we can give to others . . .
- Gift 4: A gift we can give to those in need . . .

Ask the participants to take a gift box, place the coupons in the gift box, and decorate the gift box so that they can take it home. Ask them to decide on a special time to open the gift box. (If it is before Christmas, ask the participants to place the gift box next to their nativity scene or under the Christmas tree. Open the gift box on Christmas Day at their Christmas meal if possible.)

Discuss in intergenerational groups:

- What does the story of the Visit of the Magi teach us about his divinity as the Son of God?

Give children time to draw their symbol or picture and adults time to write in their journals before moving to the next activity center.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (5-15 minutes)

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. Ask the participants to join intergenerational groups.

Ask each person in the group to share several things they learned and/or created in their learning activity centers.

Second, present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to understand Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and how he reveals who God is to us. To help us take our learning from this session and live it in our lives and homes, reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with your group.

- What new insights about Jesus Christ and about who God is did you discover through this session?
- Do you need to revise or expand your understanding of Jesus Christ and of the God he reveals to us because of your learning?
- How will your learning influence your faith in Jesus and how you live out your relationship with him?

Invite participants to take several minutes for small group sharing.

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (5-10 minutes)

Gather

Father, may we follow the example of your Son who became man and lived among us.

May we receive the gift of divine life and grow in our faith in Jesus Christ.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Listen

Romans 8:35, 37-39

Respond

Share several reflections from the “Jesus Banners” that you posted around the room. People should have identified who Jesus is for them and what they are learning about Jesus from the activity centers. Have a variety of people read the reflections.

Go Forth

Lord Jesus, Son of God, nothing can separate us from your love.

Be with us always, Nourish us, challenge us,

Help us to grow more deeply in love with you.

Send us now to be your presence in our world.

We ask this in faith, hope, and trust in you always. Amen.