

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

The school year began months ago; New Year's Day is over a month away. Yet here we are, beginning our new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent. Advent invites us to risk pushing on through the world's weariness to expectant hope. Something's coming we proclaim! Immanuel: God With Us in the form of an infant. We celebrate what happened 2000 years ago while we look to the promise that Jesus will come again. We are also called, as we live in this parenthesis time, to look for messages God continues to send: what has happened, and will happen again, is also happening now: right here.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Isaiah knew this day would come: a young woman and a baby — Emmanuel — God With Us. God chooses to dwell in the womb of a woman. A messenger is sent to assure Mary's fiancé that he should stay with her and help her raise their son. Could it be that this message, God With Us, is not just about what happened then or just what will happen in the future? Could we risk believing: God IS With Us – Now?

Theme: God is With Us

Before Class: You will need Bibles or copies of the scripture for today for the group.

Beginning: Say to the group: picture this. The man has found the woman he wants to marry, the notice has been published, and they are officially engaged to be married. Then, over a cup of tea the bride to be says, "I have something I have to tell you. An angel came to see me yesterday and told me I am about to have a baby — the Son of God." Imagine what is going through the head of Joseph!

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, that you stick with us when we receive astounding news. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25 Invite three people to read the parts of Narrator, Prophet, and Angel (see script below).

Questions:

- Describe the dilemma Joseph is facing before the angel shows up. (Verse 19. What will happen to his standing in the community if word gets out that he is marrying a woman who is already pregnant?)
- What is he considering doing? (Not making a big deal out of it to humiliate Mary, but just dismissing her quietly. Divorce was pretty easy for men.)
- What does the angel tell Joseph to do? (Verse 20b-21)
- From what we can intuit about what little we do know about Jesus' childhood, what can we imagine that Joseph brought to it? (Joseph was a father who, with Mary, frantically searched

for Jesus when he was a boy of 12 and missing from the trip back from Bethlehem. Undoubtedly he taught Jesus the trade of carpentry. He modeled what it was to be a man providing the masculine aspect of being human in balance with the feminine that Mary offered. Joseph gives no indication of being on any kind of a power trip.)

- If this were the first time we had read this story, what would we discern about the insertion of the prophet's words in verse 23? (This baby is Emmanuel: God IS With Us.) Notice the tense of the statement: "is" — not "was" or even "will be" but "is."

Getting Closure: Invite the group to be silent for a moment or two and consider what it means to us to know that God is with us, and so, therefore, we are with God. After some silence, invite people to share what this might mean for them or in society today.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for every clue we have that you are right here, with us, now. Emmanuel, help us to see and know you. Amen.

Matthew 1:18-25

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Narrator: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

Angel: 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

Narrator: ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

Prophet: ²³'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'

Narrator: ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

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