

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C - Fourth Sunday of Advent
Lesson Plan for Younger Children

Scripture: Luke 1:39-45

Background: Advent extends an invitation. The invitation: don't just do something – stand, watch, prepare. *Stand*. Choose to believe that ours is a safe universe – a universe God chose to enter as an infant. *Watch*. Look for a coming that has already come and will come again. *Prepare*. Snatch moments from our busyness. Watching for wisps of awe and wonder to show up. Rediscover that God has chosen to dwell in us and we are invited to dwell in God.

What if – just what if – Jesus is already right here, standing silently with us, walking ahead of us, showing us we don't have to do it all? Could it be that we are called to be still, notice, listen – and then follow?

Advent Theme: Christ will come again: We watch, we prepare, we get ready.

A Notation for this week's Gospel: Mary has simply accepted the message the angel gave her. Now she goes to the one other woman on the planet with whom she can talk: her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, who is expecting a baby whose name will be John. Blessed is she who believes. But what does Mary make of the baby in Elizabeth's womb "leaping" at the sound of Mary's voice? Who is the baby John? Who is this baby Mary carries?

Theme: Who is this child?

Before: To make a manger will need a cardboard box with a lid, some yellow or beige tissue paper, scraps of cloth and a pair of scissors. You may have chosen to bring stuffed animals, or you may wait and see what the children will bring. You will also need the blue cloth and the string of Christmas tree lights. You may also need paper and crayons. You will notice that we have added an additional passage to today's readings as we will not have these stories in our class time this year.

Beginning: Greet the children and welcome whatever stuffed animals are joining them. Tell the children to place the animals on a table you have prepared, so the animals can take a little nap to be all ready to play their parts in the story.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the stories we have today of the coming of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

The Story: You can use the paraphrase below, or find the corresponding lessons in one of your children's Bibles and use it to tell the story.

Tell the children we have two stories: one that people are hearing in church today and one we will hear this week when Christmas comes. While the children are listening to the story, give each child a sheet of tissue paper and invite them to tear the sheets into tiny, tiny pieces, tearing

the tissue yourself to show them how to do it. This way, we will have straw when we set up our manger. If they are seated at a table, most of the strips will fall onto the table. If you are seated on the floor, give each child a container to catch the strips.

The first story is about Mary and her cousin, Elizabeth. Each of these women was going to have a baby. Mary got on her donkey and went to visit Elizabeth. Have any of you ever known a woman who was going to have a baby? Did you ever get to put your hand on the woman's tummy and feel the baby kicking inside her? Well, before Mary even got to put her hand on Elizabeth's tummy, just as soon as she said: "Hi, Elizabeth!" the baby in Elizabeth's tummy jumped inside her.

Both Mary and Elizabeth thought that this baby was going to have a special job to do. And they both knew that Mary's baby would also have a special job to do.

The next story is the story of Mary's baby being born. Do you think the baby was born in a beautiful hospital? No, he wasn't. He didn't even get to be born in Mary's and Joseph's house. They had to go to a city far away and they were in this foreign city when the baby was born. Did they get to stay in a nice hotel? No, the hotels were all full and they had to stay out of town in a funny little place where the animals all came to eat their supper and sleep. Baby Jesus was born in a place full of animals. Angels found out about it and went and told some shepherds. The shepherds raced to see for themselves. So in the middle of the night, and in the middle of a bunch of animals, the baby Jesus was born and Mary cared for him.

Activity: Using the items you have assembled, invite the children to set up a manger scene. The blue cloth can go down first for the box to sit atop. Stand the box on its side. Spread the tissue strips on the floor of your box. You can have the children take turns being Mary and/or Joseph, sitting in the manger with the baby Jesus. With a piece of cloth, make a blanket for the baby Jesus. A small box can become the bed for the baby. Invite the children to tell you the story as they place the animals and the people in the manger. When everything is arranged the way you and the children decide, place the string of Christmas tree lights around the manger, plug them in, turn off all other lights. Sing "Silent Night."

Option: If time remains, and the children want to, let them each draw a picture of the manger scene they have made – so they can take it home and show it to their parents.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to share what their favorite part of the story is. Invite them to share who they would like to be in the Christmas story. Invite the children to gather the stuffed animals they brought so they can take them back home. Invite them to put the animal somewhere that will remind them that their animal and they are a part of this Christmas story.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for bringing us Jesus as a baby. Be with us as we celebrate and remember his birth. Amen.

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