

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday of Advent
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 24:36-44

Happy New Church Year! The Gospel according to Matthew will be our main guidebook through Year A. Matthew appears to have had a hunch that the Son of Man's expected return just might be taking a bit longer than expected. Matthew helps us figure out how to live — as we celebrate the birth and life of Jesus and await his coming again. One thing Matthew is very clear about: be ready!

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

Keep awake, for you do not know when Jesus is coming back. This message is not intended to cause us to cower in fear. Fear provides a useful warning signal, but it can also have the potential to paralyze us. Instead, we are called to the opposite of fear; we are called to faith.

Theme: Be Ready for Messages

Before Class: Decide if you are going to do anything to change how the classroom looks for Advent. If you have an altar, change it to either blue or purple (depending on what color your church uses) or add an advent wreath.

For each of the four weeks in Advent a project is suggested that the children can display for all in the congregation to see. You may want to collaborate with the church leadership to find the most appropriate place for the display.

An optional activity is offered this week that invites the children to look at some of the "messages" and "messengers" recorded in the Bible. You will need a large piece of paper (poster board, for example) and either crayons or felt markers. If you will have time to do this activity, copy these citations on separate small sheets of paper so that each child receives at least one:

- Genesis 9:12-13 (the rainbow);
- Genesis 18:1-2 (the three "men" who came to tell Abraham his wife would have a baby);
- Genesis 22:11-13 (an angel calls to Abraham to tell him he need not sacrifice his son and sends, instead, a ram for the sacrifice)
- Genesis 32:24 (the "man" who wrestled with Jacob)
- Genesis 41:1-3 (fat cows and lean cows in the Pharaoh's dream);
- Exodus 3:2 (the angel of the LORD appearing in the burning bush);
- Exodus 16:4 (manna in the desert)

- Judges 6: 37-40 (Gideon’s fleece that receives dew and then is dry when all else is wet);
- 1 Samuel 3:4 (God calling to young Samuel);
- Isaiah 6:6-7 (the seraph cleanses Isaiah’s lips with a live coal);
- Luke 1: 11 (Angel appears to Zechariah);
- Luke 1:26-27 (Angel appears to Mary);
- Matthew 1:20 (Angel appears to Joseph).

You may well have a favorite not listed here, so use it, too. Note: all these citations come from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. If you are using another translation, check to see if any of the citations appear in a slightly different verse.

Beginning: Tell the children we are going to be noticing ways messages are sent and received. Ask them to think of ways we get messages to each other today (examples might include phone, cell phone, FAX, e-mail, web page, blogs, mail, packages sent by UPS or FedEx, iPods, radio, TV, movies, videos, CD’s, DVDs. etc.)

What did people do to send messages 100 years ago? (Mail, telegram, teletype, morse code, packages sent only by mail – no UPS, a very few “Victrolas” [to play 78 speed records], a very few telephones, etc.)

Do they know of anything before that? (Pony Express, runners, smoke signals, etc.)

What does God use to send us messages? (People, events, angels, etc.)

If time permits, invite some speculation about what **might** be available in the next 50 to 100 years for messages (cell phones implanted in our ears, ability to receive TV signals on our bodies, etc.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for all the ways we have to send and receive messages. Help us to be alert to messages you are sending to us. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 24: 36-44 Invite as least two readers, one to read verses 36-41 and the other to read verses 42-44.

Questions:

- If Jesus is the messenger in this passage: what would we say is the message?
- I wonder if any parts were scary? (The possibility of Jesus coming back and only some people noticing. A house could be broken into by thieves, if no one was watching.)
- What do we understand Jesus to be saying about our being “ready?” (Pay attention to what is important and don’t get bogged down with stuff that is not important.)
- What things are we doing that we think Jesus will think are important? (Taking care of our bodies, eating food that is healthy, doing our best at school, looking out for people who need our help, etc.)

Option: Looking at other messages we know about by reading the Bible. Give each child a sheet of paper with one of the passages listed above. Each child will also need a Bible. Ask them to find the “messenger” or the “message” and be prepared to describe it to the others.

Activity: A 21st Century Angel

Invite the children to come up with what they think an angel sent to us in the 21st Century would look like. The children could work in groups of two or three if you have several children, or all together if the group is small. Do they think God would send tall, male angels with huge wings? If not, what might they look like? Invite them to draw on a large piece of paper (so the angel is life size) what this angel might look like. If they want to, they could post the angel where all in the church could see their work.

Getting Closure: Ask the children to explain the choices they have made, perhaps to give the angel a name, and then decide if they want to post it where all in your church can see it.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that angels usually come as a surprise. Thank you that you send angels to help us be who you call us to be. Amen.

Matthew 24:36-44

36 ‘But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

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