

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

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: The messenger the children could craft today is the angel who appeared to Joseph. The materials needed are several white plastic bags (the kind sold as garbage can liners) and something to stuff the angels with (if you have read this lesson several weeks before the date of the class, you could have been collecting plastic grocery bags, the bags newspapers sometimes come in, the bags stores provide when you have made a purchase. These wadded up can become stuffing. If you have not had time to gather these, newspapers will work almost as well.) A roll of gold gift-wrap would be good. You will also need transparent tape and a length of yarn or string, to cinch in the angel's waist and to use if you are going to hang the angel up someplace.

Beginning: Tell the children we have a story about someone who had “cold feet” — had second thoughts about something.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for messages that sometimes come in dreams. Amen.

The Story: Matthew: 1:18-25 Invite three people to read the parts of Narrator, Angel, and Prophet. (Note: Since verse 25 could cause embarrassment to a child to read, this final part is marked for the teacher.)

Questions:

- When Joseph said “yes” to the angel, how do we think he understood fitting into God's plan? (He had an important part to play, he was needed; he was loved by God.)
- What do you think Joseph's “yes” to the angel — agreeing to get married to Mary and share with her in raising Jesus — added to Jesus' life? (He grew up in a house where both parents shared in raising him, and his daddy taught him how to be a carpenter.)

- How do you think Jesus was prepared for the work he would do? (Accept the answers the children give. You may add that Jesus must have studied the Hebrew Bible for he knew it very well.)

Activity: A huge angel can be made from white plastic bags. Show the children the bags and what you brought for stuffing, the gold paper and the yarn or string. Let the children come up with the design — how wide the wings should be, how many bags to make the body, etc. When they have completed the angel, be ready to take it to the appointed place in your church at the end of your session.

Option: If there is not a place at your church this week to display a three-dimensional angel, consider making a two-dimensional one to hang on the wall of your class space.

Getting Closure: If you still have all the messengers your group created this Advent, bring them to your circle and ask the children to tell the stories about each of them. Wonder with the children what messages each of us may be invited to bring to someone.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for the messengers you send us. 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.’

Teacher: 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.

Printed by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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