

**Lesson Plans that Work**  
**Martin Luther King Jr.**  
**Lesson Plans for Older and Younger Children**  
**Feast Day, April 4**

**Martin Luther King Jr.**  
**January 15, 1929-April 4, 1968**

The saints are “the lights of the world in every generation,” people whose lives and deeds have shone brightly and helped others more closely follow God. There are saints who lived long ago and there are saints living and working in the world today, saints who are known by the church and saints who are known only to God. We say that the church—we—are part of the Communion of Saints, the company of all faithful people, connected through our baptism to those Christians who have died, those who are alive now, and those who haven’t yet been born. The word “saint” means holy.

In the Episcopal Church we have a Calendar of Saints, holy men and women we remember in prayer and with readings from the Bible on their feast day.

**Supplies needed:** white cloth for prayer table, a candle. For older children: a Bible, the text or a recording of “I Have a Dream” speech, drawing and watercolor materials. For younger children: a brown egg, a white egg, a clear bowl, drawing materials.

*The picture book edition of “I Have a Dream” by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. illustrated by Kadir Nelson which comes with a digital recording of the speech published in 2012 by Random House that is highly recommended for this lesson.*

**Prepare:** Prepare your prayer/gathering space with a small table, or space with a piece of cloth. On this cloth place a white candle. If you like, you might place a photo of Martin Luther King, Jr. on the table.

**Welcoming the children:** Gather the children around the prayer space and ask some wondering questions: I wonder what kind of person is called a saint? I wonder what the work of a saint might be? (You may wish to share the introduction above.) Today we will hear the story of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Light the candle.

**Opening prayer:** Jesus, your saints are the lights of the world in every generation. Help us to shine as they do, letting your light glow in us that through us others might see you. Amen.

**Tell the story:**

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929. His birthday is a national holiday, in honor of his work as a civil rights leader. He and his father were both named for a famous Catholic priest who inspired important changes in the church. When Martin was growing up, black people and white people were not treated equally in much of the United

States. Black people could not drink from the same water fountains, eat at the same restaurants or go to the same schools as white people. Martin decided at an early age that he would work to change that. He skipped two grades in school and went to college at the age of 15. After attending seminary and graduate school, he became a minister like his father and his grandfather. He married a woman named Coretta, and had four children, two boys and two girls.

As a minister, he was known for his powerful preaching and teaching about how God wants us to live. Martin's first church was in Montgomery, Alabama, where a black woman named Rosa Parks one day decided that she would not give up her seat to a white man and move to the back of the bus. Martin knew how he could help her. He asked all the black people in Montgomery to stop riding buses until the bus company changed its rules and started treated black people and white people equally. It took more than a year, but it worked.

Martin's way of working for justice was a peaceful way, even when he was arrested and his house was bombed. "Hate cannot drive out hate," Martin said. "Only love can do that." In 1963, Martin helped organize the March on Washington. More than half a million people came to support changing laws that kept black people from being treated fairly. Martin's famous speech that day described his dream of freedom and equality for all people. One year later, the Civil Rights Act was passed and many laws that were unfair to blacks were changed. Martin continued to work peacefully, following Jesus, standing up for what was right, until he was killed in 1968. His life and his ministry inspire us to keep working for equality for all people everywhere.

### Questions:

- I wonder what part of Martin's story you like best?
- I wonder what part of Martin's story you think is the most important?
- I wonder what part of Martin's story is also about you?
- You may move to another space with tables for the activity time.

**Activity for Older Children:** One of the readings appointed for Martin Luther King, Jr. is from Genesis 37:17-20, the story of Joseph the dreamer, whose brothers were jealous of him and decided to get rid of him. Eventually, they sold him into slavery, but Joseph became a powerful leader in Egypt. Pharaoh, Egypt's king, believed Joseph's dreams and because of that, Joseph was able to save the Egyptians and even his own brothers from a terrible famine.

Read the following verses:

<sup>19</sup>They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer. <sup>20</sup>Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.'

Read or listen to the "I have a dream" speech, beginning at the line, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'" Continue to the end of the speech. Talk together about Martin's dream, and how it has continued after his death. Invite the children to illustrate the part of the speech that most inspires them.

**Activity for Younger Children:** Show the children the two eggs and ask them whether they think the eggs are the same or different. Crack the eggs into the bowl one at a time. No matter what we look like on the outside, inside we are the same. Martin's most famous speech is about his dream that everyone will one day live the way God wants us to live, treating each other fairly and with love, no matter the color of our skin or how different we might be. Read this quote: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." What we have inside us is the most important part of us. Talk together about what the children dream of doing to make the world a better (peaceful, fairer) place. Invite them to draw a picture of it. If you are making a mural, begin by tracing everyone's hands in different colors at the bottom of the sheet of paper.

**Gather/Ending:** Return to your prayer space and gather in a circle to pray.

**PRAYER FOR MARTIN:**

Almighty God, by the hand of Moses your servant you led your people out of slavery, and made them free at last: Grant that your Church, following the example of your prophet Martin Luther King, may resist oppression in the name of your love, and may secure for all your children the blessed liberty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Prayer for younger children** (Use the prayer below by having the children repeat each phrase):

Dear God, (Dear God),  
may we with your help (may we with your help)  
follow Martin(follow Martin),  
standing up bravely (standing up bravely)  
for what is right and fair, (for what is right and fair,)  
choosing peace and love (choosing peace and love)  
in the way of Jesus (in the way of Jesus).  
Amen. (Amen.)

*Written by: Wendy Claire Barrie*

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

*© 2014 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.*