

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

Scripture: Luke 1:39-45 (with Luke 1:26-38 as optional reflection)

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 Class: Since the story of the birth of Christ does not appear in the next two Sundays' readings (it is reserved for the readings for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day), you may wish to invite your class to fill in the blanks as the Option for today's lesson. You will need large construction paper, butcher paper, crayons, markers, and the readings for today.

Beginning: Describe to the children which option you have chosen and what to expect. If it is to stick with only the scripture for the day, begin by posing this question: What if someone comes up to one of your friends and says, "You are so cool. You always seem to have just the right thing to say." Which of these would your friend be likely to say: (1) "Thank you." Or (2) "Get outta here, I am not all that cool." Why do the children think the response would be the one they picked?

Opening Prayer: Dear God, help us to "wonder" today – at the people you choose to do your work, including us. Amen.

The Story: Luke 1: 30-45 Invite two readers: one to be the narrator (verses 39-42a) and one to be Elizabeth (verses 42b-45.)

Reflection Questions:

- What is the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth. (They are probably cousins.)

- Who is the baby that Elizabeth will give birth to? (John the Baptist.)
- Why do you think Mary decided to go visit Elizabeth? (The angel had told her that Elizabeth was going to have a baby and that might have been the first Mary heard that news. Perhaps she realized that Elizabeth could give her some good advice about taking care of babies.)
- What do you think is the significance of the baby in Elizabeth "leaping" when Mary spoke? (It was understood as a sign by the writer of this Gospel that Mary had a special job to do for God.)

Luke 1: 30-38: In order to find out just what Mary did know about this baby, we can read the verses before today's reading: Luke 1: 30-38. Ask someone to read the words of the Angel, then we can take some notes on what Mary would have heard.

Reflection Questions:

- What is the first thing the angel says? (Do not be afraid. Angels always seem to have to say that.)
- What do we think this angel looked like? A soft pretty girl with golden curls? A huge, kinda scary guy who looks like he could play football? (We don't know, but probably more like the second.)
- What are the words the angel uses to describe this baby to be born? (Verses 32 and 33.)
- What is this baby Jesus to be called? (Verse 35b: Son of God.)

Activity:

Option 1: Give each child as large a sheet of paper as you can acquire (perhaps light-colored sheets of 12" x 18" construction paper) and crayons or markers. Ask each child to draw what they think the angel looks like.

Option 2: Roll out some butcher paper/roll paper and have the class create the scene of the Angel and Mary meeting and/or Mary/Jesus and Elizabeth/John meeting.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to share what they have done. Invite the children to share what they like best about the stories today.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for always finding ordinary people to do your work. Help us to see the important work you have for each of us. Amen

Luke 1: 26-38 (optional)

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Narrator: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said,

Angel: 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'

Narrator: But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her,

Angel: 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Mary: 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

Angel: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Mary: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

Narrator: Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:39-45

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Narrator: In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry,

Elizabeth: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year C - Fourth Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Luke 1:39-45

(Luke 1:26-38 reflection is offered in addition to this as a way to go deeper into the story)

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 Class: Make sure you have enough bibles for each participant, or you can make copies of today's reading (found at the end of the lesson). You might consider gathering copies of the Hymnal (1982) and concluding with either singing – or simply reading the words – of Hymn 60 "Creator of the stars of night."

Beginning: If the moments of silence at the beginning of the class have been useful to your group, begin today with silence. You could enter into it with these words from Mary's song: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." If you are using an Advent Wreath, light all four candles and read one of the opening sentences for Advent on page 75 of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Opening Prayer: God our Savior, we are here as your servants. Let our lives be like Mary's and let it be with us according to your word. Amen.

Luke 1:26-38 Option: If time permits, read Luke 1:26-38, before today's appointed reading. Ask one person to read the part of the narrator, one the part of the angel, and the third the part of Mary.

Reflection Questions:

- Notice what Mary hears from the angel and her response to what she hears – particularly the things she does NOT say.
- Verse 28: The angel's greeting, and Mary's response.
- Verse 30-33: The angel's description of what is to happen and who this baby is, and Mary's response in verse 34.
- Verse 35-37: The information the angel adds, and Mary's response in verse 38.
- Notice some of the things Mary does NOT say: "Who me?" "I think you have made a mistake." "I am not worthy." "This is going to be too hard, I can't do it."
- I wonder what we would say if this happened to us.

The Scripture: Luke 1: 39-45 There are two with speaking parts, the narrator and Elizabeth, so invite two people to read this passage.

Invite the members of the class to find a time in their lives, not necessarily to share with anyone else, when they have found themselves in a place out of the norm. Perhaps it was comparable to Elizabeth's situation of having a dream come true – but so late in life some might scoff. Or Mary, hearing of a commission she has no idea how she will manage to fulfill. And if they cannot find such a place in their own lives, have they watched someone close to them go through something remotely comparable.

Reflection Questions:

- Holding onto what surfaced for each person, paraphrase what Mary and Elizabeth express in these few verses:
- Mary: She immediately set off to see her cousin. Why? To help Elizabeth get ready? Someone older and wiser to talk to? Someone who might help her fathom what she has heard?
- Elizabeth: Perhaps people had laughed at the sight of such an old woman pregnant. Perhaps she was lonely (her husband had lost the use of his voice: Luke 1: 20) Perhaps she now, as her baby leaped inside her womb, senses that her baby, also, has a commission from God.

Getting Closure: If there are any announcements regarding worship services for Christmas, share them with the group. Announce whether you will meet as a class over Christmas Break.

Then, you pass out copies of the Hymnal, turn to Hymn # 60 ("Creator of the stars of night") and choose to sing it together, read the verses together, or invite a different person to read each verse.

Closing Prayer: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. (Luke 1: 68)

Luke 1: 26-38 (optional)

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Narrator: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said,

Angel: 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'

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Angel: 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

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