

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday after Christmas
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: John 1:1-18

Background

The world – that played Christmas carols all through the penitential season of Advent – has packed away the ornaments, taken down the Christmas trees, and has moved on to after-Christmas sales. We gaze in wonder at the gift shimmering before us that we have barely unwrapped, let alone begun to understand. God among us – the Word made flesh. So we make the only response we can: we celebrate! We keep the greens in the church and sing the Christmas carols. We are being nurtured for the work that will be given us to do.

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

Today we hear from the Gospel of John – his version of the birth story. “The Word was with God and the Word was God.” This Jesus, whom we can begin to grasp as the baby born on Christmas, is obviously something infinitely beyond our understanding. This is light no darkness can blot out. This true light is now loose in the world. This is light born into the world by God simply speaking.

Theme: Light and Word

Before Class: You will notice that the Scripture for today (John 1: 1-8) is incredibly beautiful and mostly over the heads of the children. The words, read by you, at the end of your time together may find a place in the child and will grow in years to come.

There are three options for today, keeping in mind you may have a different make up of children today because of the holidays.

- Birthday Party: angel food cake, cake decorations, candles, juice or water.
- Mini-Pageant: items for costumes such as robes, towels, cloth, scarves, baby doll, stuffed animals for the manger, etc.
- Creating a Manger Scene: large piece of paper or butcher paper and crayons

Note: Keep in mind that your class may be small today if people are still away for the holidays, AND you may have new children there that are visiting for the holidays. You may want to have nametags. Make sure and have everyone introduce themselves if that is the case. You can go around the circle and invite each child to say their name and the first thing they did on Christmas morning. OR their name and the most memorable thing about Christmas for them. Keep this in mind during the lesson, trying not to ask too many questions from the previous weeks.

Beginning: Greet the children with "Christ is born!" and invite the children to share what they did at their house for Christmas. Try to steer them away from a litany of "I got...." Ask what special food did they had. Did any other people come to your house? Ask if anyone has a specific cultural aspect to their Christmas (Swedish meatballs, Mexican tamales, etc.) and invite their stories.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us Jesus. Thank you that he came as a baby and we can be together today to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.

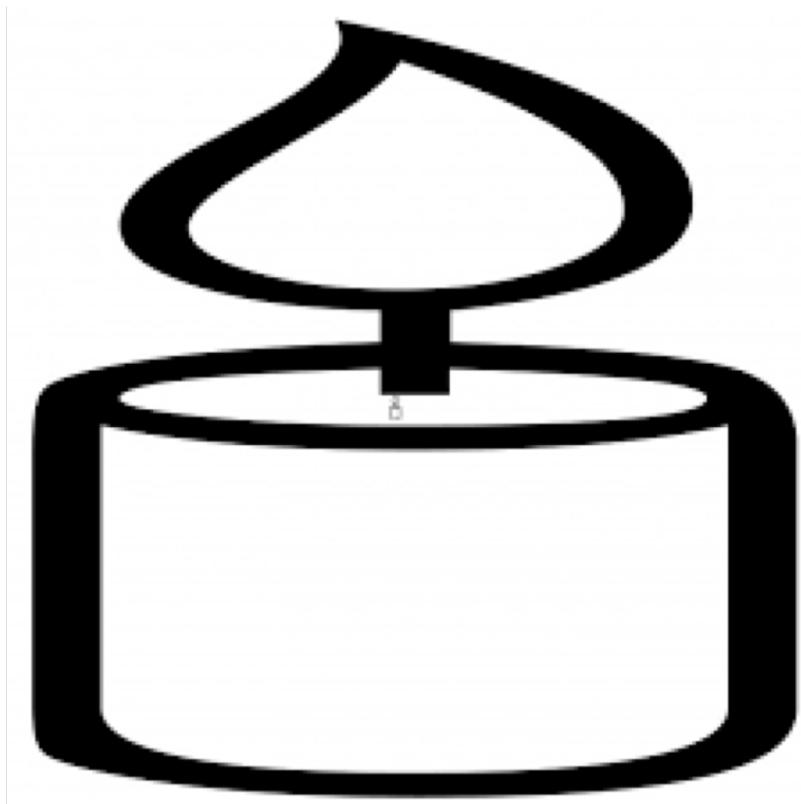
Mini-Pageant: If the children have been involved in – or witnessed – a church pageant, invite them to recreate of it in the class. That way, if only a few of the children got to participate, all can take turns playing the parts. If there was no pageant, the children could present a mini pageant to you, either taking the parts themselves, or using stuffed animals to represent Mary, Joseph, the baby, shepherds, angels – even the three kings arriving a bit early.

Candle Creation: Invite the children to decorate a paper candle in honor of Jesus birthday. You can draw one giant candle and have everyone decorate it together, or you can print out individual sheets for them to decorate.

Birthday Party: Ask the children what we usually do when someone is having a birthday. How do we celebrate the birthday? A cake, of course! Show the children the angel food cake you have brought. Invite the children to help you decorate the cake with the sugar. Then, light the candles and sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus. Blow out the candles and have a little party.

Getting Closure: Depending on which option you chose, invite the children to tell you what you have done together today and gather the ideas for your closing prayer.

Closing Prayer: You could simply sing a verse of “Silent Night” – or again thank God for the gift of the baby Jesus. Or if time permits and it feels right to you, read the gospel for today to the children (John 1: 1-8).



John 1: 1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ') ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday after Christmas
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: John 1:1-18

Background

The world – that played Christmas carols all through the penitential season of Advent – has packed away the ornaments, taken down the Christmas trees, and has moved on to after-Christmas sales. We gaze in wonder at the gift shimmering before us that we have barely unwrapped, let alone begun to understand. God among us – the Word made flesh. So we make the only response we can: we celebrate! We keep the greens in the church and sing the Christmas carols. We are being nurtured for the work that will be given us to do.

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

Today we hear from the Gospel of John – his version of the birth story. “The Word was with God and the Word was God.” This Jesus, whom we can begin to grasp as the baby born on Christmas, is obviously something infinitely beyond our understanding. This is light no darkness can blot out. This true light is now loose in the world. This is light born into the world by God simply speaking.

Theme: Light and Word

Before: You will need Bibles or copies of the scripture for each person, a large piece of paper (from a flip chart, for example), and felt markers. You may also want to supply some cookies and milk or water. You will also need colored modeling clay, markers, colored paper, white paper, glitter, glue, scissors, paper and pens.

Note: Keep in mind that your class may be small today if people are still away for the holidays, AND you may have new children there that are visiting for the holidays. You may want to have nametags. Make sure and have everyone introduce him or herself if that is the case. You can go around the circle and invite each child to say their name and the first thing they did on Christmas morning. OR their name and the most memorable thing about Christmas for them. Keep this in mind during the lesson, trying not to ask too many questions from the previous weeks.

Beginning: Spend time talking about the events of Christmas day, etc. Encourage the children to describe traditions in their homes – special foods, music, etc. You may wish to serve cookies and milk or water as you talk.

The Story: John 1:1-18: Invite someone read the passage aloud while the rest of the class follows in their Bibles or on a printed copy of the passage. Introduce the passage by explaining that this is a very different rendition of the Christmas Story. There is no baby in the manger, no star or shepherds or Wisemen. It is a passage full of symbols.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what images you heard in today’s reading?

- What images come into your mind as you hear this passage? Share in a word or two all the pictures you saw in your mind as you listened.
- What do you think the writer means by "the Word" was there from the beginning?
- What does "the light" mean to you? What do you associate with light?
- Why do you think the writer chose these images to talk about Jesus?

Activity:

Retell Christmas to a Stranger: Tell the children that you have just arrived on this planet and you are trying to make sense of what you have observed this past week. Ask the children to bring you up to speed. Some questions to get them started: "Whose birthday was this past week, Jesus or a jolly man in a red suit? 'Santa', I think you call him. Or was it a reindeer with a red nose? Where was this Jesus born and what are his folks' names? What did their house look like? Who came to see the new baby?"

After you have had this discussion, invite the children to create a huge Christmas card and draw the elements of Christmas – the manger, the baby, shepherds on a hill, angels – even the wise men approaching from a distance on their camels.

Candle Creation: Invite the children to decorate a paper candle in honor of Jesus birthday. You can draw one giant candle and have everyone decorate it together, or you can print out individual sheets for them to decorate. What words can they put on or around the candle to describe God or Jesus? What words would they want to add to remind them of Jesus' love for them?

Symbols

Provide the class with colored modeling clay, markers, colored paper, white paper, glitter, glue, and scissors. Ask them to think about the passage and create a symbol that stands for what they feel when they think of God entering the world as a human being. They can be as abstract as they want to be.

If art isn't someone's thing, they might prefer to write a haiku poem to express their feelings of God becoming human. The formula for haikus:

Line one: 5 syllables

Line two: 7 syllables

Line three: 5 syllables

Normally the first two lines describe something in nature and the final line compares that to a feeling or something human.

Getting Closure: Read John 1:1-8 again.

Closing Prayer:

Collect for the First Sunday after Christmas

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer, page 213)

John 1: 1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ') ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday after Christmas
Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: John 1:1-18

Background

The world – that played Christmas carols all through the penitential season of Advent – has packed away the ornaments, taken down the Christmas trees, and has moved on to after-Christmas sales. We gaze in wonder at the gift shimmering before us that we have barely unwrapped, let alone begun to understand. God among us – the Word made flesh. So we make the only response we can: we celebrate! We keep the greens in the church and sing the Christmas carols. We are being nurtured for the work that will be given us to do.

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Theme: Light and Word

Beginning: Enjoy time together with coffee and cookies.

Ask each person to think of ONE thing that happened this Christmas that really worked for them. Many of us are still beating ourselves up about having spent too much money, too little time with those we love, and just getting so tired! Now we can offer a cool cup of mercy to each other by sharing Christmas joys. Perhaps it was one hymn that really sang to you, time spent with a young child, a particularly delicious meal.

Opening Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, you came among us as a child, that we might know you as the incarnate God. Be with us as we continue this Christmas journey. Today, we thank you, God, for ... (Say some of the things you heard during the earlier discussion). Help us to see you present in the world around us. Amen.

The Scripture: John 1: 1-18. Invite someone to read the passage aloud while the rest of the group follows in their Bibles. Introduce the passage by explaining that this is a very different rendition of the Christmas story, perhaps equally familiar, but it contains no baby, no manger, no stars or angels or shepherds or wise men.

Reflection Questions:

- What strikes you first when you hear this passage?
- What do you think the writer means by "the Word" that was present from the beginning? What relationship do you see between Jesus and the creation of the world?

- How do you reconcile the line "the light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" with the terrible evils of this life? What does "the light" mean to you? What do you associate with light?
- What other images from the reading stand out for you?
- Why do you think the writer chose these images to talk about Jesus?
- On a piece of newsprint make two columns, one headed by the word "GOD," the second headed by the word "Jesus." Brainstorm to come up with words that describe God. Then brainstorm to come up with words that describe Jesus. Compare the two lists. How do we think of God and Jesus? Do we use different words in describing them? How are the lists alike? How are they different?

Getting Closure: Sing the second verse of "O come all ye faithful."

Closing Prayer:

Collect for the First Sunday after Christmas

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer, page 213)

John 1: 1-18

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