

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Lesson Plans for Younger 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: A simple craft, "Angels to Go," will need at least one facial tissue per child (probably more!), either cotton balls (a portion of a tissue balled up could be substituted), and thin ribbon, string, or even plastic twist-its. Be prepared to share with the children a dream you have had that was either pleasant or funny — no nightmares. If you are going to do the movement activity with the children, consider dressing in clothes that will enable you to flop on the floor.

Beginning: Ask the children if any of them have had a really fun dream they would like to tell us about. If it seems appropriate, tell them your dream. Then tell them our story today is about a dream. But first, today we light all four candles, or color the fourth candle on our artwork.

Praying: Thank you, God, for dreams that help us know you love us. Amen.

The Story: Joseph was about to get married to Mary, who would be the mother of baby Jesus. He was all ready to get married to her. Then Mary told Joseph something that sounded very strange to him. She told him an angel had come to her house and told her she was going to have a baby, the baby would be the son of God. Joseph went back to his house and thought and thought about this. He was thinking he had better not get married to her, even though he wanted to. He worried and worried, and finally he fell asleep. While he was sleeping an angel came to him in a dream. Maybe it was the same angel that had visited Mary. The angel told Joseph that he should get married to Mary. The baby would need a daddy, and Joseph would make a very good daddy to baby Jesus. When Joseph woke up, he and Mary got married and Joseph was a good daddy for Jesus.

Movement Activity: A movement activity for Joseph’s dream. Ask the children to show with their bodies what adults look like when they are worried. (They pace around, maybe with arms crossed, worried faces.) So, together we can be a very worried Joseph, pacing around the room. Then, let’s get very tired and slump on the floor and pretend to fall asleep. Now while our bodies are being asleep, let’s get up and become great big, huge, angels with immense long wings we can hold out with our arms. We can swoop around the room being angels until we find Joseph asleep and can come hover over Joseph and then tell him Jesus needs him to be the daddy. Then the angels can swoop off and we can be Joseph again, waking, rubbing our eyes, and feeling much better. Of course, be open to the children’s suggestions for the choreography.

Activity: Angels to Go

Show the children how to shape the angels by folding the tissue diagonally, then poking a cotton ball, or a balled up piece of tissue, in the center to make the head. Tie a piece of ribbon or string—or use the plastic twist-it—at the “neck” of the angel and fluff out its wings. The angels can go home with the children and perhaps one or two could stay in the classroom to greet the children when next they come.

Getting Closure: Sit in a circle with the children, angels seated in front of each child. If the children know “Silent Night” you could sing a verse of the carol together.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for Joseph the daddy of Jesus. Help us to follow you as Joseph did. Amen.

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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.

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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.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

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: You will need Bibles or copies of the scripture for today for the group.

Beginning: Say to the group: picture this. The man has found the woman he wants to marry, the notice has been published, and they are officially engaged to be married. Then, over a cup of tea the bride to be says, "I have something I have to tell you. An angel came to see me yesterday and told me I am about to have a baby — the Son of God." Imagine what is going through the head of Joseph!

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, that you stick with us when we receive astounding news. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25 Invite three people to read the parts of Narrator, Prophet, and Angel (see script below).

Questions:

- Describe the dilemma Joseph is facing before the angel shows up. (Verse 19. What will happen to his standing in the community if word gets out that he is marrying a woman who is already pregnant?)
- What is he considering doing? (Not making a big deal out of it to humiliate Mary, but just dismissing her quietly. Divorce was pretty easy for men.)
- What does the angel tell Joseph to do? (Verse 20b-21)
- From what we can intuit about what little we do know about Jesus' childhood, what can we imagine that Joseph brought to it? (Joseph was a father who, with Mary, frantically searched

for Jesus when he was a boy of 12 and missing from the trip back from Bethlehem. Undoubtedly he taught Jesus the trade of carpentry. He modeled what it was to be a man providing the masculine aspect of being human in balance with the feminine that Mary offered. Joseph gives no indication of being on any kind of a power trip.)

- If this were the first time we had read this story, what would we discern about the insertion of the prophet's words in verse 23? (This baby is Emmanuel: God IS With Us.) Notice the tense of the statement: "is" — not "was" or even "will be" but "is."

Getting Closure: Invite the group to be silent for a moment or two and consider what it means to us to know that God is with us, and so, therefore, we are with God. After some silence, invite people to share what this might mean for them or in society today.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for every clue we have that you are right here, with us, now. Emmanuel, help us to see and know you. 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.'

Narrator: 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.

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