

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Easter
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: John 20:1-18

“I have seen the Lord!” exclaimed Mary Magdalene. At first she does not recognize who is standing beside her. When she realizes it is the risen Jesus she wants to grasp him. He holds her off and tells her to go and share what has happened: He has walked through death and has created a path for us to follow, now and on through our own death.

In these 50 days of Easter, celebrating what Jesus has done for us, we are invited to recognize Jesus standing beside us, as he did with Mary. What is he calling us to do? Perhaps we can train our eyes to look in the direction that this Jesus, standing beside us is looking. What might he be looking at? Do we dare follow where he is leading? Can we notice and honor the various ways Jesus “appears” to people?

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

First Mary Magdalene, then Peter and another disciple, peer into the tomb. The body is gone but not stolen. Remaining in the tomb were the cloths, just as the women had placed them around their Lord’s broken body. Jesus is now transformed into his resurrected body. What transformation is Jesus calling us to in our time and place?

Theme: Come and See

Before: Your time with the children may be longer than usual. An introduction activity is provided in the event there are children who do not know each other. Options for going outside are offered, if your setting and the weather permit.

Creating a special worship space: Use a small table (or a cardboard box), a white cloth (a length of inexpensive white cloth about a yard-and-one-half long or an old sheet cut to fit). A clear glass container such as a mason jar, half-filled with baking soda (which can act as a fire-extinguisher if needed), and a small votive-type candle inserted in the container create the setting. The fireplace matches sold in some stores make lighting the candle easier. Use your own imagination about what else can go on the altar. (A small bouquet of flowers pretty rocks, seashells, pine cones, or whatever is native to your area).

During the Easter Season, the children will create decorations to be pinned onto the cloth, creating a circle of their own creativity around the worship space. You will need sheets of 8 ½ x 11” paper cut in quarters, crayons, and straight pins to pin the drawings on the cloth. A walk is an option is offered for both this group and Older Children, so you might want to consider coordinating it with the teacher of the other group.

Story Telling Option: To tell the story in a more visual way, bring lengths of white cloth about 4 or 5 inches wide. You could use an old sheet you tear into lengths or long white scarves.

Beginning: (If there are children visiting) Stand in a circle, tell the children your name, and ask each child to say his or her name, one after another. Then, you name each child (even if you have to ask the child for his or her name) with a statement on this order: Good morning, Ashley, it is good that you can be here, Hello, Brendan, good to have you here with us, etc.) Then notice something that a new child could answer, such as: Is anyone here wearing black shoes? Does anyone have on a red shirt? How many boys are here today? How many girls? Keep going until each child has had a chance to speak.

Ask the children to each find a chair or a place on the rug and make a circle. Sit in the circle with the children. Ask the children what we call this day. What are we celebrating this day? (You will get Easter Bunny, candy, and toys, probably.) You can tell the children that today is Easter Day. You can add that all this celebration happens because Jesus who died on a cross, did not stay dead. You can also tell them that Easter is a Season, so we will be celebrating Easter for six more weeks.

Tell the children that we are going to create a special worship space to celebrate Easter. Show them what you have brought and invite their help in setting up the table or box, covering it with the cloth, placing the candle on the space and adding whatever else you have brought. When it is set to everyone's satisfaction, stand in a circle around the worship space and pray the opening prayer.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending us Jesus who teaches us important things. Thank you for the Easter Season we begin today and for all the children who are with us today. Amen.

The Story: Invite the children to listen to the story of Easter morning. Jesus' friends were very sad. Jesus had died and they missed him. When he died, the women in their group carefully prepared the body of their Jesus, so it would be ready to be buried. (If you have the cloth, pretend to be gently wrapping it around Jesus.) They gently washed his body and then wrapped his entire body in soft white cloths. The men helped them place Jesus in a tomb. (A tomb was a cave, a cool, empty space in a hill.) They rolled a great big stone in front of the cave so the body would be safe. Then they all went home and were sad. Very sad. They missed their friend. The next morning, the women went back to the tomb. The stone that was protecting the tomb had been rolled away. "How could that happen?" they asked. Then, they peered into the tomb. They looked and looked. The body of Jesus was not there! They raced to find other friends, and they rushed back and peered into the tomb again. Jesus was not there, but the cloths were all there, just as the women had placed them on the body of Jesus. Now Mary was very, very sad. She was standing by the tomb, crying and crying when someone said to her, "Why are you crying?" She started complaining to this person, telling him that Jesus was gone when suddenly she realized: it was Jesus she was talking to! Jesus was standing there in front of her. "Wow!" she called out. "I have seen the Lord!" And she raced to tell all her other friends.

Questions:

- I wonder what it would have been like to be Mary?
- I wonder what you would do if this happened to you?

Activity: Tell the children that they can take turns being the women who get Jesus' body ready for burial, the men who help the women, and the men who come with the women the next day.

And they can take turns playing the part of Jesus. Let the children decide what will be the tomb (a table turned on its side, for example). Enact the discovery of the risen Christ as many times as the children want, making sure that each child gets to play whichever parts the child wants to play.

Activity: Tell the children that we are going to be adding to our worship space during the Season of Easter by making our own decorations to pin on the cloth. Give them the squares of paper and crayons to draw what they want about the story. Tell them they may make two drawings if they want: one to pin on our worship space cloth and another to take home with them.

Option: If your situation and the weather permit, take a walk with the children. If you go outside, look for signs of spring, even if it is just the suspicion of buds on bare trees or a tiny blade of green in the snow. If you cannot go outside, consider a tip-toe walk to peek into the sanctuary where people are worshipping. When you return, talk about what you saw.

Getting Closure: Invite the children back to the circle to tell the group about the picture they have made to pin on the cloth. As each child finishes telling the story of his or her drawing, help the child pin the drawing to the cloth.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for the Easter Season and for Jesus who loves us. Amen.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Easter
Lesson Plans for Older Children

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“I have seen the Lord!” exclaimed Mary Magdalene. At first she does not recognize who is standing beside her. When she realizes it is the risen Jesus she wants to grasp him. He holds her off and tells her to go and share what has happened: He has walked through death and has created a path for us to follow, now and on through our own death.

In these 50 days of Easter, celebrating what Jesus has done for us, we are invited to recognize Jesus standing beside us, as he did with Mary. What is he calling us to do? Perhaps we can train our eyes to look in the direction that this Jesus, standing beside us is looking. What might he be looking at? Do we dare follow where he is leading? Can we notice and honor the various ways Jesus “appears” to people?

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

First Mary Magdalene, then Peter and another disciple, peer into the tomb. The body is gone but not stolen. Remaining in the tomb were the clothes, just as the women had placed them around their Lord’s broken body. Jesus is now transformed into his resurrected body. What transformation is Jesus calling us to in our time and place?

Theme: Come and See

Before Class: The theme for the Easter Season, especially for children this age, is: We can trust Jesus. We may not be able to exactly understand everything, but we can be sure Jesus is leveling with us. We can encourage questions doubts as we look for what Jesus is calling us to do and be. The children will be invited to notice ways we can respond to what Jesus would have us do.

You may have children you do not normally have in your group, perhaps brought to church for just this day. The goal is to make them feel welcome and a part of the class as much as possible.

You will need copies of the scripture for today and materials for an Easter banner including a long sheet of paper, markers, streamers, ribbons, glitter, etc.

Beginning: Tell the children you are going to pretend you know nothing about Christianity and that they are going to help you to understand by tracking this last week’s events, from Palm Sunday (last Sunday) through Holy Week, the Crucifixion, and now Easter. Tell them you will ask them questions, so together, you can piece some things together. Ask them: What happened on Palm Sunday? Does anyone know what Maundy Thursday means? (The day Jesus had the last supper with his disciples and showed us how to have Holy Communion). What happened on Good Friday? Why in the world would we call it Good Friday? (Jesus’ message was that violence does not work. There has to be a better way.) What would we say that Resurrection means? (Jesus showed us that death is not the end and that we can change the way we do things while we are still alive.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus whom we can trust. Amen.

Option: Explain to the children that it is the custom of Jewish people to bury the dead within 24 hours. It was also the custom to wash the body and wrap it in clean cloth. None of this could be done during Passover. Jesus was crucified, we believe, on the afternoon when Passover would begin at sundown. When they had to leave, they hurriedly rolled a stone over the opening of the tomb to be sure no one disturbed the body of their beloved Jesus. So the women had very little time to complete the preparation of Jesus' body and may well have been returning to the tomb three days later, after Passover, to complete the anointing with spices that they would have completed had not Passover intervened.

The Story: John 20: 1-18 Invite children to read the parts of: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Mary Magdalene, the Angels, and Jesus.

Questions:

- Who do we believe was the first person to get to the tomb on Easter morning? (Mary Magdalene)
- What did she find? (The stone rolled away)
- What did she do? (She raced to get Peter and John)
- Who got there next and what did he do? (John, who was younger than Peter and simply outran Peter and when he got there, he stood and looked into the tomb.)
- Who got there after John, and what did he do? (Peter, who went into the tomb)
- What did verse 7 mean to the disciples? (Jesus' body had escaped without the linen cloths being unwound so Jesus clearly had not been stolen but had been transformed into the resurrected Christ.)
- What does John figure out in verse 8-9? (He remembered that Jesus had promised he would rise from the dead, and now he could believe it.)
- What did the disciples do then and what do we suppose was the reason? (They left. They went home. This was hard stuff to figure out. Maybe they needed time to figure out what they were going to do next.)
- What happens for Mary as she stands there crying? (verse 13)
- Why do we suppose that Mary did not recognize Jesus when she saw him standing there nor did she recognize his voice when he spoke to her? (His appearance was changed. We do not know exactly what this means, but he is recognized when people spend time with him.)
- What happens to Mary when Jesus obviously recognizes her? (His recognition of her makes it possible for her to "see" Jesus.)
- What does Jesus respond to Mary when she calls him "Rabbouni" which means teacher? (Don't hang onto me. I will be with you in a different way than before.)
- Now what does Mary tell the others? (verse 18b)

Activity: Invite the children to pretend they are the disciples trying to piece together the story so that it makes sense to us. We can pretend we are back in the room where we had had supper with Jesus. One of the children can volunteer to be Mary Magdalene, another could be Peter or John. The rest of you can ask them questions to try to understand what they have encountered.

How did the stone get rolled away? (We don't know). Describe the way the cloths looked. (Not neatly folded as they would have been if Jesus had not really died. Not tossed to one side, if someone had "stolen" Jesus. The cloths were just as they had been left.) What did Jesus look like? (Well, different, but hard to describe).

Option: Invite the children to create an Alleluia Easter banner. Using a long sheet of paper, invite them to write an Easter message (Alleluia, Christ is Risen or something they think up) and then decorate the banner with coloring, streamers, ribbons, etc.

Getting Closure: Ask the children if they can remember what Jesus said to Mary once she recognized him. (Do not hold onto me.) How can we follow Jesus without holding on to him? If we trust that Jesus is beside us, even if we cannot see him, how will that make it easier for us to do the work we have of growing up, learning what we need to learn, and being who we are?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that we can trust Jesus. Amen.

John 20:1-18

Narrator 1: Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them,

Mary Magdalene: ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’

Narrator 2: ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Narrator 1: ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Narrator 2: ¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her,

Angels: ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’

Mary Magdalene: ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’

Narrator 1: ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her,

Jesus: ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’

Narrator 2: Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him,

Mary Magdalene: ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’

Narrator 1: ¹⁶Jesus said to her,

Jesus: ‘Mary!’

Narrator 2: She turned and said to him in Hebrew,

Mary Magdalene: ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher).

Narrator 1: ¹⁷Jesus said to her,

Jesus: ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’

Narrator 2: ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

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