

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