

Prepare the Way!

Ideas for celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with children

It is anticipated that the people who regularly lead these sessions will have a good idea as to what is likely to work with their particular group of children. These ideas are offered for leaders to adapt according to their own situations.

KEY CONCEPTS:

- During Advent we are preparing to welcome Jesus into the world and into our hearts.
- The Bible is God's gift to us and it's one of the ways we meet with Jesus.

PREPARATION OF THE SPACE

If possible have a display ready on a large tarpaulin. Use a sprinkling of sand to indicate a path. Use bracken, branches and piles of stones on the path to create obstacles.

You may need to have the following ready depending on which activities you choose to use:

- Photocopies of the activity sheets and pens available
- A bottle of bubbles and a sheet or some tarpaulin
- A way of playing the song 'God's word'

WELCOME THE CHILDREN

This may involve lighting candles, making the sign of the cross together, or whatever else you normally do to prayerfully begin your session.

Ask the children if they can remember what colour the candle that was lit in

the wreath was today (Purple). Ask them if they can remember what season the wreath reminds us we're in (Advent). Ask them if they can remember what Advent is a preparation for (Christmas).

Explain that Christmas is a time when we celebrate three things:

- **JESUS WAS:** That Jesus is the Son of God who was born in Bethlehem **two thousand years ago**.
- **JESUS IS:** That Jesus is our Saviour in whom we find happiness, joy and hope **today**. The word 'Saviour' reminds us that he has saved us from sin and darkness bringing his light.
- **JESUS IS TO COME:** That we look forward to when Jesus the King **will come again** at the end of time to reign over a kingdom of peace and justice forever.

INTRODUCE BIBLE SUNDAY

Explain that today is also a special celebration day called Bible Sunday. Today we thank God for giving us the Bible and for speaking to us through the Bible. Another name for the Bible is 'God's word'. We can meet Jesus in a very special way when we read or hear the Bible.

INTRODUCE TODAY'S READINGS

This session plan has been based particularly on the first reading (Baruch 5:1-9) and the Gospel (Luke 3:1-6). You may wish to read shorter versions of the readings depending on the age of the group (Baruch 5:7-9; Luke 3:2-6).

Explain that in the first reading we hear about God's people who had been taken away from their homeland and away from God's temple, but who were coming back. We hear that God was making their path back easy for them. In the Gospel we hear about another path. Ask if anyone can remember who Jesus' cousin was (John the Baptist). In the Gospel John is telling people to get ready for Jesus' coming and to make Jesus' path easy for him.

LISTEN TO THE READINGS

Consider praying a simple prayer before listening to the readings, and singing an Alleluia to mark the Gospel. The children might like to repeat the opening prayer line by line after the leader:

***God our Loving Father,
Thank you for your word.
Your word teaches us your truth.
Your word helps us grow.
Your word fills us with your love.
Help us to listen well to your word
today and always.
Amen.***

BREAK OPEN THE WORD

Ask if anyone can remember what two things were in both the readings? (Valleys and Mountains) These are things which can make paths difficult to travel on.

If you have set up the display you could use it now. Show how the obstacles can get in our way when we're trying to get somewhere.

Remind the group what you said earlier: during Advent we remember that at Christmas Jesus comes to live in our hearts in a special way and we use this time of waiting for Christmas to get ready for his coming. Baruch in his reading and Luke in his Gospel talk about there being a path between us and God.

Ask the group:

- What could some of the obstacles be? (e.g. cheating, fighting, stealing, lying etc)
- How can we get the path between us and God better? (taking away obstacles, not putting any more obstacles there!)
- How can we make our heart more ready for Jesus to live in it? (prayer, listening to Jesus, keeping the 'path' clear)

If you're using the display, as suggestions are made you could remove obstacles from the path.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Depending on the age of your group you may choose to use one of the following activities:

- **OLDER GROUP:** Give each child a copy of the activity sheet. Explain that the small footprints at the top are theirs and the big ones at the bottom are Jesus'. The stones and mountains represent some of the things that get in the way between them and Jesus. Ask them to consider how they can make the path between them and Jesus clearer. They may need reminding at this point of the examples that were given previously. Ask them to write or draw on their sheet some of the things they could do during the rest of Advent to get ready for Jesus' coming. These instructions will need repeating.
- **YOUNGER GROUP:** Ask the children to think about some of the things they could do during Advent to get ready

for Jesus' birth. Ask them to think particularly of nice things they could do for other people. Give examples: Maybe they could share things more with other people? Maybe they could be more kind to other people? Explain that you're going to blow some bubbles (*you may wish to do this with a sheet or some tarpaulin covering the floor*) and they're going to imagine, as they look at the bubbles, that each bubble is someone they could be extra kind to in the next couple of weeks. If they want to they can speak out the names of the people they think of. These instructions will need repeating and one of the leaders may need to begin speaking out to encourage the children to.

CELEBRATE BIBLE SUNDAY

Ask what the name of the book is that our readings came from today (the Bible).

Explain that the Bible, God's word, is God's gift to us. It helps us know how much he loves us, how he forgives us when we go wrong (sin) and helps show us how we can live in a good and happy way.

Consider teaching the group the song 'God's word'. The tune can be found at catholicbiblesunday.com, or you can make up your own. Some words may need explaining to younger children (treasury/eternally).

**God's word is a history
Of our Catholic family.
God's word is a treasury
That shows me Jesus' love for me.
I will trust the Bible
For the Bible's God's gift to me.
God's word shows the way for me
To live with him eternally.**

Simple actions could be taught to the group:

God's word is a history (**Hands held**

out closed in front of self, then open as if a book)

Of our Catholic family (**Arms open to gesture to the group)**

God's word is a treasury (**Hands held out closed in front of self, then open as if a book)**

That shows me Jesus' love for me (**Hands cross over one's heart)**

I will trust the Bible (**Hands held out closed in front of self, then open as if a book)**

For the Bible's God's gift to me (**Bring open hands into body as receiving the gift)**

God's word shows the way for me (**Hands held out closed in front of self, then open as if a book)**

To live with him eternally (**Hands raised up to heaven)**

Consider praying again the following prayer, with the children repeating each line:

**God our Loving Father,
Thank you for your word.
Your word teaches us your truth.
Your word helps us grow.
Your word fills us with your love.
Help us to listen well to your word today and always.
Amen.**

RETURN TO THE CONGREGATION

Consider asking one of the children to pray the prayer above for the congregation. You could include an opening line: 'On this Bible Sunday'.

Consider asking the children to sing the song 'God's word' for the congregation. If they're not able to learn the words you could have the song sung for them and they could do the actions.