

Liturgical Year Supplemental Lesson

Advent and Christmas

Correlated Materials

Student Text: Chapter 15, pp. 73–77

LESSON FOCUS

During the liturgical seasons of Lent and Easter, we walk with Christ in His Passion, death, and Resurrection. Easter is the greatest celebration of the Church year.

AIMS

- Students will understand that if they offer sacrifices of prayer and obedience, they will be blessed.
- Students will understand that Advent is a time of waiting for the Lord; we offer sacrifices of prayer and obedience, and God blesses us during this time with joy and happiness.
- Students will learn about Advent traditions.

MATERIALS

- Bible
- White board and markers
- Traditional Advent symbols (see Focus 2)

Optional:

- Nativity scene and straw or copies of Nativity scene, yellow construction paper and crayons (see Focus 2 Optional Activities)
- Liturgical calendar handout (see Online Appendix)

Begin the Lesson

Preparation (5–10 minutes)

Use one or more of the following resources for prayer and student preparation for the lesson.

SCRIPTURE:

“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20).

We give glory and praise to Jesus, Our Lord and Savior.

SACRED ART: Student Text, p. 74

The Adoration of the Shepherds, Giorgione

Notice the shepherds as they adore the Christ Child.

PRAYER WITH CHILDREN: Hail Mary, Student Text, p. 155

Proclamation (1 minute)

(Proclaim slowly, then repeat.)

As God’s people waited for Jesus to come, they prayed, obeyed, and made sacrifices, and they were blessed. Advent is a Church season of prayer and sacrifices as we wait for the great blessing of the birth of Jesus.

Lesson Explanation (30–35 minutes)

Explain focus points in your own words or use the discussion points and questions.

Focus 1: God blesses those who offer prayers and acts of love and obedience.

- We receive blessings when we obey. *Have you ever received a blessing or reward because you obeyed your parents or a teacher? (Answers will vary.)*
- Today we are going to look at a few blessings and rewards that God’s people received because of their prayers and sacrifices.

WORDS TO KNOW

manger: a box that holds feed for animals

stable: a place where farm animals are kept

Bethlehem: the town where Jesus was born

- God blesses Abraham.
 - God promised to send a Savior after the Fall of Adam and Eve. God's Chosen People had been waiting thousands of years for the Savior to come. During this time God's people prayed and offered sacrifices of obedience and love. They received many blessings in return. One person who God blessed was Abraham.
 - **Using the sacred art** on Student Text, page 26, *Angel Preventing the Sacrifice of Isaac*, Tiepolo, review the story of Genesis 22:1–18, **or read** paragraph 3 on Student Text, page 28, that begins with "One day God tested Abraham . . ."
 - **How did Abraham show his trust and love?** (He obeyed God.)
 - When Abraham arrived on the mountain, he built an altar to worship God. **Did Abraham offer a sacrifice?** (Yes, out of obedience, he offered his firstborn son, Isaac.)
 - **What happened before he offered his son?** (God provided the sacrifice of a ram.)
 - Because of Abraham's obedience, God blessed him in three ways: Over the years God multiplied Abraham's descendants; He made them into a great nation and God gave him land; the Savior will come from Abraham's descendants.
- Abraham's descendants would always remember his faith and obedience; from this they learned to have faith and to trust God just as Abraham did. They learned that faith, prayer, and obedience brought many blessings.
 - We too offer prayers and acts of love and obedience for God. God continues to bless those who offer prayers and acts of love for Him and for others.
 - We too are waiting; we are waiting to celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus. **How can we be like Abraham, offering ourselves (time, self, will) during Advent?** (Prayer; love and obedience; love our families by being kind; obeying our parents and teachers when it is difficult; etc.)
 - **How can we offer up prayer, small acts of sacrifice, and obedience during Advent?** (Mass; Rosary; prayers at meals and bedtime; loving our families and friends; obeying our parents and teachers.)
 - **Have you ever noticed that when you pray or make small acts of kindness that God blesses you?** (Have students cite examples of prayer bringing peace, love, and joy into their lives.)

Conclusion: When we pray, sacrifice, and obey God, we will be blessed by God as Abraham was blessed.

Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus

Though one of the most popular saints in the Church, little is known about Saint Nicholas except that he was born in Parara, a city of Lycia in Asia Minor, and he was the bishop of Myra in the fourth century. His relics are preserved today in the church of San Nicola in Bari, Italy. He is the patron saint of mariners, merchants, bakers, travelers, and children, and his feast day is December 6. Tradition asserts that he became well known during his life for giving generous gifts to many people, including the poor. In the United States he is identified with Santa Claus, the jolly man in a red suit who brings presents to children every Christmas Eve.

Focus 2: Advent is a time of preparation and waiting.

Advent is also a time of many blessings of joy and happiness. There are many traditional ways that the Church celebrates Advent. Through these traditions we are reminded of Jesus' sacrifice, and we offer our prayers and acts of love to Jesus.

- Advent is a season of waiting and sacrifice for the blessings of Christmas. The color purple reminds us to do penance to prepare for something special. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas. This is a time of preparation for the coming of the Savior. Below are traditions kept during Advent.
- Discuss one or more of the following traditions with the students; provide samples or pictures.
 - **Advent wreath**—The advent wreath is a ring without a beginning or end (like God, Who has no beginning and no end). It is made of evergreen as a sign of eternal life. There are four candles used in this wreath: three purple (to signify penance and preparation) and one pink (to signify the joy that Christmas is closer on the third week). One candle is lit during each week of Advent. You can say prayers when lighting the candles.
 - **Manger scene**—Saint Francis designed the Nativity scene to help us meditate upon the coming of the Christ Child. During Advent, we will often put up the scene, but not the baby Jesus, so we can look forward to His coming.
 - **Advent calendar**—There are different types of calendars. With some you open a door, and there is a Bible verse behind them. With others, there are chocolates inside.
 - **Jesse tree**—Jesus came from the family tree of Jesse (father of David). The Jesse tree uses symbols to trace the family lineage from Jesse up to Jesus. Every Jesse tree is different.
 - **Christmas tree**—The Christmas tree is usually an evergreen, a sign of life. It is a symbol of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden and of the Cross. Jesus in the Eucharist is the fruit of the Tree of Life offered up on the Cross. Sometimes people will hang ornaments on the tree, reminding them of the life of Christ, as well as a nail to remind them of Jesus' sacrifice.
- (Use any of the Advent traditions in the classroom during Advent.)

Conclusion: We prepare and wait for the birth of Christ during the season of Advent through many traditions such as an Advent wreath, manger scene, Advent calendar, Jesse tree, or the Christmas tree.

Review Supplemental Lesson—Liturgical Year: Advent and Christmas (3 minutes)

- God blesses those who offer prayers and acts of love and obedience.
- Advent is a time of preparation and waiting. Advent is also a time of many blessings of joy and happiness.

FOCUS 2 OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Set up a classroom Nativity scene without a manger. Prepare a manger using pieces of straw. (Hint: If you do not have actual straw, you may cut strips of yellow construction paper large enough to write acts of kindness, etc. This may be easier if each student has a drawing of a Nativity scene on a piece of paper and uses “straw” to build a manger.)
 - Have each student make personal promises to Jesus. Tell them that when Advent begins they should try very hard to perform acts of sacrifice, obedience, and love each day.
 - Explain that an act of sacrifice means giving up something they like for the love of Jesus (candy, video games, etc.). Each week that they perform an act of sacrifice, obedience, or love, they may place a piece of straw in the classroom manger for baby Jesus.
 - When Christmas Day comes, the students’ good deeds will cushion the Savior’s bed. If you do not have a classroom Nativity, instruct students to use drawing of the Nativity scene on page 248 instead.
- Online Appendix: Liturgical calendar. Use this to explain liturgical seasons. Color each season according to its liturgical color: Advent and Lent: purple (penitence and sorrow); Christmas and Easter: white (purity, joy, innocence, holiness, and glory); Ordinary Time: green (life and hope).
- Discuss Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus. (See sidebar.)

- We celebrate many customs and traditions during Advent and Christmas.

Application (20–25 minutes)

Choose one or more of the following for discussion.

- We receive blessings from our sacrifices and prayers. **What Catholic tradition does your family use at home to prepare for the coming of the Savior?** (Direct students to realize that secular preparations such as shopping are not as important as spiritual preparations such as an Advent wreath.)
- **Remind students** that through Abraham’s obedience, he received many blessings (large family, land, etc.).
 - **What blessings would you like for Christmas?** (Direct students to ask for nonmaterial blessings such as love in family, healing of sick family member, etc.)
 - **What acts can you perform that may help to bring about those blessings?** (Answers will vary. Lead students to provide specific examples of prayer, sacrifice, obedience, and love.)

Celebration (5–10 minutes)

Choose one or more of the following.

- Quiet students and *listen* to refrain of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” in the *Adoremus Hymnal*, #301 (www.ignatius.com/promotions/adoremus-hymnal/downloadable-mp3s.htm).
- Focus on the Blessed Mother in the picture in Student Text, p. 54.
- Pray the Hail Mary, Student Text, p. 155.
- Remind students that December 8 is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (celebrating that the Blessed Mother was free from Original Sin), a Holy Day of Obligation. (See Student Text, p. 143, Q 118.)

15 The Christ Child Is Born

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and his name shall be called Emmanuel. . . .”

Matthew 1:23

How would you feel if you and your family sat for a long time in a cold, dark room with no light? That is how the people of Israel might sometimes have felt during their long wait for the Messiah. They waited in darkness for two thousand years. At last God kept His promise. He sent the world a Savior Who shattered the darkness with a great light. Jesus is the Light of the World.

God did not send a rich king or strong warrior to be the Light of the World. He sent a little child. This child was His own Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus is God, but He was born into the world as a man like us. God the Father invited Mary to be a part of this special plan to save His people. Jesus came to the world because Mary answered yes.

Mary was a young woman of Nazareth. She was in her simple, village home one day when the angel Gabriel appeared before her to bring God’s message:

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you...You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:28, 31, 35).

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Mary knew if she said yes it might mean great sorrows as well as great joys. But she wanted to do whatever God asked. She bowed her head and told the angel: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.” Mary’s quiet yes was still a secret to God’s people, but it was the beginning of His loving plan to save them from sin.

An ordinary girl might have been afraid. But Mary was special. God prepared her to be the Mother of the Savior even before she was born. He had given her a gift which we call Mary’s Immaculate Conception. This means that Mary was created free from Original Sin. From the moment she was conceived in her mother’s womb, her soul was filled with sanctifying grace. Mary did not need to be baptized because she always had God’s life in her soul. This is why she was worthy to be the Mother of Jesus. God also chose a good man named Joseph to marry her and be the foster father of Jesus. A **foster father** is a man who takes the place of the real father.

On the night of Jesus’ birth, Mary and Joseph walked from inn to inn looking for shelter. They were in the town of **Bethlehem** because the Roman governor made all people return to their hometowns. The little town of Bethlehem was full. Every innkeeper told Joseph, “Sorry, there is no room for you in this inn.”

At last, Joseph found a **stable** under the stars. Animals were sheltered beneath its roof. Jesus was born that night among the gentle oxen, donkeys, and lambs. Mary wrapped Him tenderly in soft cloth and laid Him in a **manger**, a box that held food for the animals. The Son of God spent His first earthly hours on a **humble** bed of straw.

An angel appeared to shepherds on the hillsides near Bethlehem and proclaimed, “Behold, I bring you Good News of great joy! Today, in the town of David, has been born to you a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. You will find Him lying in a manger.” Full of wonder, the shepherds ran to be the first to adore Him. Later three wise men

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followed a great star to find the Child. They brought Him precious gifts for a King: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We can bring the Christ Child our hearts, as our gifts for Him.

Christmas is Jesus’ birthday. Every year we sing carols to celebrate. This carol was written over a hundred years ago:

WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE

We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, Moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

O star of wonder star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Born a King on Bethlehem’s plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King for ever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.

Words to Know:

foster father Bethlehem stable manger humble

*“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
among men with whom he is well pleased!”*

Luke 2:14

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- Q. 68** *Did Jesus Christ always exist?*
As God, Jesus Christ has always existed; as man, He began to exist from the moment of the Incarnation (CCC 461, 470).
- Q. 69** *From whom was Jesus Christ born?*
Jesus Christ was born of Mary ever-virgin, who therefore is the Mother of God (CCC 485, 495–96, 499).
- Q. 70** *Was Saint Joseph the father of Jesus Christ?*
Saint Joseph was not the *true* father of Jesus Christ; as the spouse of Mary and the guardian of Jesus, he was the foster father of Jesus (CCC 532).
- Q. 71** *Where was Jesus Christ born?*
Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem, in a stable, and He was placed in a manger (CCC 525).
- Q. 72** *Why did Jesus Christ wish to be poor?*
Jesus Christ wished to be poor in order to teach us to be humble and not to place our happiness in the riches and the pleasures of this world (CCC 526).
- Q. 73** *What is the Epiphany?*
The Epiphany is a feast celebrated to remember how the wise men followed a star to Bethlehem to adore Jesus, bringing Him gifts fit for a king. This event shows that Jesus is Savior of the whole world (CCC 528).