

December 23, 2018

Fourth Sunday of Advent

# Children Celebrate!

Liturgy of the Word with Children

## Today's Readings

Micah 5:1–3  
Psalm 80:1acdef, 2c, 14–15ab  
Luke 1:39–45

Mary Visits Elizabeth

## Preparation

### Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.



## Prepare with Prayer

How lovely your dwelling, O LORD of hosts! My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the LORD. My heart and flesh cry out for the living God. As the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest to settle her young, My home is by your altars, LORD of hosts, my king and my God! (Psalms 84:2–4)

## Scripture Background

The prophet Micah, who lived in the eighth century BC, is credited with inspiring some of the reforms of King Hezekiah. Micah was a simple rural man like the prophet Amos and—also like Amos—a champion of social justice. Micah's prophecies, however, do not apply solely to the moral and religious abuses of his own time and place.

Centuries after his death, New Testament writers understood the passage used in today's First Reading to be a prophecy about the future coming of Jesus, the Messiah. (Consider, for example, the words of Matthew 2:5–6, in which Temple scholars quote Micah to answer Herod's question about where the Messiah is to be born.) Modern scholars who have carefully analyzed Micah's language say his meaning was not necessarily that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah but that the Messiah would be able to trace his lineage back to Bethlehem. Both Mary and Joseph had ancestral ties to the town.

## Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a violet cloth, place:

- ▶ a Lectionary
- ▶ a battery-operated candle
- ▶ the collection of prepared items
- ▶ a CD and CD player ready for the entrance hymn

From catalogs and magazines, cut out pictures of items that children would enjoy owning. Also cut out a picture of the Baby Jesus, perhaps from a greeting card. Put each picture into a different envelope, bag, or box according to a definite pattern: put the biggest, most desirable items in the littlest, least attractive containers, and vice-versa. Thus, the picture of Jesus should be in the smallest, least attractive container of all. Prepare a container for each child you think will be present for today's liturgy.

## Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

**Gathering:** "Mary, You Said Yes to God" (Seeds CD-2, Track #24) or "Mary, Our Mother" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #11)

**Gospel Acclamation:** "Alleluia" (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)

In today's Gospel, the babe's leap for joy in Elizabeth's womb is rich in Old Testament symbolism, according to Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP. It is like King David's joyful dance before the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel 6:11-15. It is like the prophecy about lame people suddenly leaping around like deer in God's Kingdom (Isaiah 35:6). It is like the description of mountains and hills gleefully skipping like goats when the Lord comes (Psalm 114:6). All of these images paint a picture of a world dynamically changed by the arrival of the saving Lord.

## Children's Connections

"We're expecting our second child soon," wrote an anxious parent to an online advice columnist. "How can we best respond to our five-year-old's questions about how the baby got there, inside me?" Lisa Kainan, MA, responded by saying that it is best to let children's present level of understanding guide any discussion. It's not necessary to tell them more than they need to know for their age level and degree of curiosity. An eight-year-old will probably have more questions than a five-year-old, but at any age, Kainan advised, "It's important not to inundate a child with incomprehensible facts or to make a child feel stupid or foolish because she looks at reproduction in a fanciful way."

Today's Gospel focuses on a meeting between two expectant women, Mary and Elizabeth. The Gospel might not make much sense to children unless they have a rudimentary understanding of where babies come from, but don't think you, as a liturgical minister, need to assume a parent's duties just to conduct a discussion of today's Gospel. Especially with children of mixed ages, a "once over, lightly" approach will suffice, which question number one in the homily should provide. All that the children need to know is that babies are special gifts from God that grow inside their mothers.

## More About ...

### The Catechism on Jesus the Messiah

- "Jesus means in Hebrew: 'God saves.' " At the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel gave him his name to express his identity and mission. (#430)
- Through his Incarnation Jesus united himself to all humanity in order to save all humanity. (#432)
- "The word 'Christ' comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*, which means 'anointed.'" (#436)
- In ancient Israel those consecrated to God for a kingly, priestly, or prophetic mission were anointed in God's name. "Jesus fulfilled the messianic hope of Israel in his threefold office of priest, prophet, and king." (#436)
- " 'The one who anointed is the Father, the one who was anointed is the Son, and he was anointed with the Spirit who is the anointing.'" (#438)
- Jesus accepted his rightful title of Messiah, though with some reserve because it was understood by some of his contemporaries in too human a sense, as essentially political." (#439)

### The Children's Leaflet

The leaflet for this week helps children learn about being fair and just, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

If you distribute the leaflet now and time permits, you may wish to read with the children the summary of the Gospel in "The Word of God This Week" after you have read the Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

## Leaflet Activity

This week, children will be reminded that amid all the excitement and fun of Christmas, Jesus is the greatest gift we receive.

**ACROSS**

- Where Mary went to visit her cousin
- He prepared the way for Jesus (three words)
- Mother of Jesus
- Father of John

**DOWN**

- Where John preached (two words)
- Mary's cousin
- Husband of Mary

## The Liturgy of the Word

### Gathering

As the children enter the worship area, play the entrance hymn. Show the children the decorated envelopes, bags, and boxes, and tell them that these are “pretend gifts” for a game of “pretend Christmas.” Have the children come forward, one at a time, to choose and open a gift for all to see. At the end of the game, ask the group which child has selected the best gift of all. If no child says so, point out that life without this or that toy would be okay, but life without Jesus would be terrible. Promise to say more about this during the homily.

### Collect

**Leader:** Invite the children to bow their heads. Then pray:

Loving God, in just a few more days, Christmas will be here. Even as we enjoy giving and receiving gifts under our Christmas trees, we promise to remember that your Son, Jesus, is the greatest gift of all. Thank you, loving God, for Jesus!

**Children:** Amen.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

## First Reading

**Leader:** Who can name a big city? Who can name a small town? When the prophet Micah lived, his homeland’s biggest city was Jerusalem, and one of its small towns was Bethlehem. Listen carefully now to what Micah says about Bethlehem. Read Micah 5:1–3. Then say, “The word of the Lord.”

**Children:** Thanks be to God.

## Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

**Leader:** Rouse your power, O Lord, and come to save us.

**Children:** Rouse your power, O Lord, and come to save us.

**Leader:** Read Psalm 80:1acdef, 2c, 14–15ab.

## Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the proclamation of the Gospel.

## Proclaim the Gospel

**Leader:** Micah had promised that an important leader one day would come from Bethlehem. He was talking about Jesus. In today’s Gospel, we will learn about a visit that Jesus’ mother made to her cousin Elizabeth before Jesus was born.

The Lord be with you.

**Children:** And with your Spirit.

**Leader:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke.

**Children:** † Glory to you, O Lord.

**Leader:** Read Luke 1:39–45. Then say, “The Gospel of the Lord.”

**Children:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

## Homily

First, ask questions to check the children’s understanding of the Gospel.

1. What does the Gospel mean when it says that Elizabeth’s baby moved within her?
2. Why does Elizabeth say that Mary is blessed more than any other woman?

Ask why we are more blessed than the people who lived before Jesus was born. Help the children see that without Jesus there would be no Christmas holiday to celebrate, no Easter. There would be no Christian churches doing all the good things they do. Be as concrete and as specific as possible, perhaps naming popular parish programs that wouldn't exist. Remind the children that saintly persons (Mother Teresa, their parish patron saint, etc.) might not have been saintly without Jesus to love and his example to imitate.

Conclude by observing that Elizabeth's baby jumped for joy when Mary came to visit. We, too, should jump for joy that Jesus has entered our world!

### Profession of Faith

**Leader:** Now jump to your feet for our profession of faith! Answer each question with, "Joy to the world!" On the day the world was made, what did God the Father bring to the world?

**Children:** Joy to the world!

**Leader:** On the first Christmas Day, what did God the Son bring to the world?

**Children:** Joy to the world!

**Leader:** On the first Pentecost, what did God the Holy Spirit bring to the world?

**Children:** Joy to the world!

### Prayer of the Faithful

**Leader:** Because we are God's people, sent to bring joy to the world, let us pray to our loving God for all the world's needs. To each petition, please respond, "Bless us, O Lord." Through Pope \_\_\_\_\_ and all leaders of the Church, bless us, O Lord.

**Children:** Bless us, O Lord.

**Leader:** With world leaders who are honest and just, bless us, O Lord.

**Children:** Bless us, O Lord.

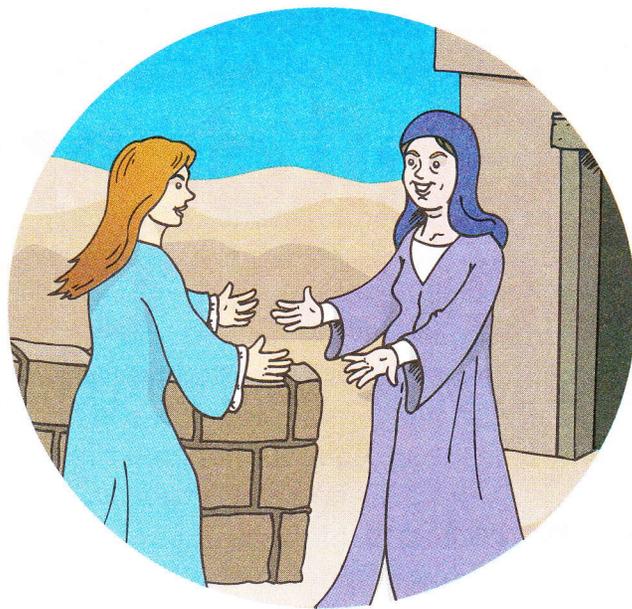
**Leader:** With holy women like Mary and Elizabeth, bless us, O Lord.

**Children:** Bless us, O Lord.

**Leader:** With holy men like Micah the prophet, bless us, O Lord.

**Children:** Bless us, O Lord.

**Leader:** Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:



Let us pray. Loving God, as we unwrap our gifts on Christmas Day, we ask you to bless all the gift-givers in our lives. Help us remember, too, that you have given us the best gift of all in Jesus, your Son. This we ask through the same Christ our Lord.

**Children:** Amen.

### Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to complete the Family Corner activities as a family.