



Seasons <sup>OF</sup> <sub>THE</sub> Spirit™

# Seasons ENCORE

## Ages 15-18

Weekly resources to help nurture  
actively growing faith

*Revised Common Lectionary Year B*  
FEB 26/2012 to MAY 27/2012

**LENT, EASTER**

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*Ages 15–18 Supplement* data disk with several pieces of recorded music, video clips, poster images for projection, supplementary articles.

**Note:** *Music Booklets* are available as an optional purchase from your Distributor.

*From Start to Finish* provides suggestions for beginning and ending the year, plus an overview of *Seasons of the Spirit*. It can be downloaded free from the Library at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

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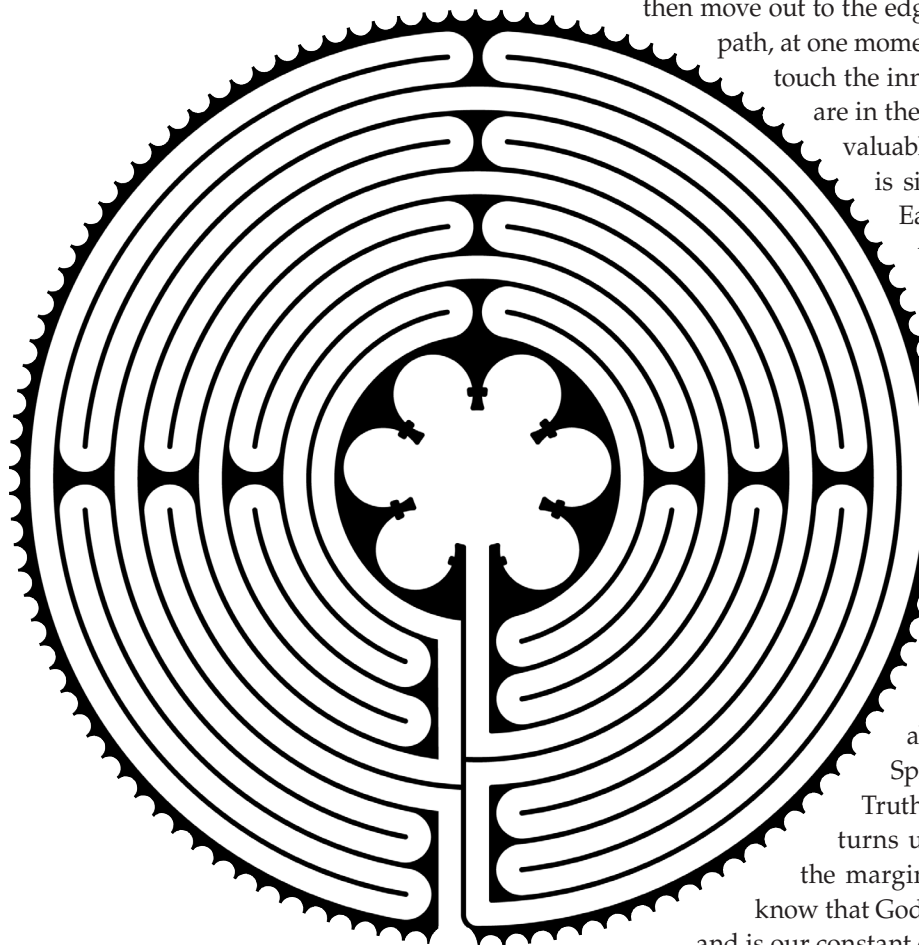
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# About this Lent and Easter



**T**he labyrinth is a path that leads inward to a centre point, and back out again...but not directly. The circuits, or pathways, of a classic labyrinth like the one at Chartres cathedral in France draw close to the centre and then move out to the edges all along the way. Moving on the path, at one moment you find yourself close enough to

touch the inner core and in the next moment you are in the outer orbit. Neither position is more valuable – there is no “goal” at the centre, it is simply another place on the journey. Each spot has its particular perspective, its point of view and its truth.

The stories we encounter in this Lent and Easter take us on a labyrinth journey, moving us into the heart and out to the universe. God’s promises of presence, grace, peace, friendship, and joy are viewed from every perspective. There are rainbow reminders way out in the sky. An old man and an old woman hold their hopes as closely as a baby to the breast. Cosmic unity sparkles in the dew of the field and the stars above. Peace enters the room, and the Spirit enters the gathered community. Truth whispers, “Come closer,” and then turns us outward to engage each other on the margins. Through it all we are invited to know that God can and does meet us where we are and is our constant companion along the way.

Like a labyrinth journey, Lent and Easter is a time of allowing ourselves to be guided towards new insight and transformation. Following the lead of these stories, we are free to open ourselves to promises particular to us as individuals and communities of faith. By grace, may we emerge on Pentecost empowered and renewed, a People of the Way.

# This Lent, Easter for Ages 15–18

**In this Season of Lent** young people will hear some foundational stories of God’s promises from the Hebrew Scriptures. The colour purple is the symbolic colour for this season and the worship space will be also be set with rainbow-coloured strips of paper. Weekly gathering and blessing prayers will incorporate symbolic items (see “Lenten Ritual” on p. 87). A weekly Respond option is based on “Praying the Psalms” (p. 88); consider distributing this page to be used at home if not included in the weekly sessions.

**In this Season of Easter** young people will explore stories from the gospels and Acts. Yellow or gold is the colour of this time of celebration. Review the resource sheet “The Easter Season” (p. 90) for information on setting the worship space and for the gathering and blessing prayers to be used this season.

**Supplemental resources** on the *Ages 15–18 Supplement data disk* include all the **posters** for projection, **extra articles** and **resource sheets**, a **media presentation**, two pieces of **recorded music**, and **audio recordings based on each week’s focus passage**. (Note: the media resources on this disk will only play on a computer.) At the beginning of the season take time to review these supplemental materials and consider how you might use them during the season.

**Resources for Palm/Passion Sunday, Easter Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday** are designed for all ages to meet together. Consult with other leaders for plans for these three gatherings.

Ideas for setting worship and learning spaces, community building games, and integrating music and visual arts can be found in the booklet *From Start to Finish* in the Library on the *Seasons* website.

**Preparing for the sessions** Before the beginning of the season, review the introductory pages (pp. 1 and 2), the weekly resources, and the extra materials and articles at the end. As you prepare for each week’s session, read the “Focus for Ages 15–18” on the Prepare page and

review the activities, choosing those that will appeal to the members of the group and noting those which require extra preparation. Read the article “Encyclopedias, Sunsets, and the Mysteries of God” (p. 96). Recognize the important role you have in the lives of the young people in your group. Take time to listen to their thoughts, knowing that you are on a journey of discovery and exploration together.

**Bibles** Encourage young people to bring their own Bibles. Unless otherwise stated, scripture references are from the *New Revised Standard Version*. Different translations are also useful for interpreting the texts. A **Digging deeper** option is offered each week in Engage. Choosing this option depends on the age, development, or ability of your group.

**Art** The six fine art posters included with this resource offer opportunities for young people to engage with and nurture their imaginations. Background information for these posters is provided in the article “About the Art for this Lent, Easter” (p. 95).

**Music** referred to in the sessions can be found in Volume 7 of the *Seasons Songbook* and the *Seasons Music CD*. The music is also available as *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* which can be purchased from the *Seasons* website. Printed music and song lyrics for copying are included in the *Lent, Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, available as a separate purchase. Review the article “About Music” (in Extra resources folder on *Ages 15–18 disk*) with suggestions for using music with your group.

**The Seasons website** ([www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca)) provides background information about the curriculum resources, an “Ask the Rabbi” section in the **Action Zone**, connections between weekly focus passages and current events or films in the **Spirit Sightings** section, and suggestions for additional resources in the **Links** section.

**Basic supply kit** Stock a container with clear tape, masking tape, scissors, glue sticks, white glue, washable felt markers, crayons, coloured pencils, pencils, stapler, hole punch, removable adhesive. The Prepare section in each week’s session will only list supplies not included in this kit.



# Blessed Connections

Water: essential to life, complicit in death. We are born of water and cannot live without it, but tsunamis and mud tides remind us water is not under our control. We should be wary – but also give thanks: today’s readings remind us that water cleanses and heals. Through water we are rescued.

## Focus scripture: Genesis 9:8–17

Scientists predict that water’s risks are set to worsen: more droughts, more floods, barren seas, water wars. The ancient Hebrews saw water in just this way, and the Genesis stories reflect it. Water betrays; it threatens life; if not controlled by a stronger force it can undo cosmic order altogether.

Israel’s neighbours told stories of divine beings battling amongst themselves, only noticing humans when the noise got annoying. Then the gods decided to use water to wipe the planet clean. This was the story of Utnapishtim, from the ancient epic of Gilgamesh, and the authors of Genesis knew it well: a flood that wiped out everything except for one rescued family and the animals they saved. Yes, the authors said, there’s truth in that story – now let’s tell it properly, with God at the centre.

The Genesis version has no divine battle; it begins as an outraged response to human violence, pours down grace with the waters to rescue original human blessedness, and ends with a promise to “all flesh.” Whenever the waters of chaos threaten to undo creation’s goodness, the rainbow reminds God not to let chaos prevail. Instead of destroying (dismembering) the cosmic solidarity of all creatures, God will re-member (join again in one) the flesh God first called good.

**Psalm 25:1–10** leans on the message of this story. Sin and stumbling bring consequences, but God can be reminded to forgive. “Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness sake.” We can pray for mercy because God’s rainbow shines.

Early Christians, as in **1 Peter 3:18–22**, saw the Noah story as a symbol of baptism. They confessed in Jesus Christ the Word who “became flesh” and through whom “every living creature” came to being. The waters

of baptism do not symbolize washing off the dirt of everyday life: they are a sign of our return to “original blessedness” out of chaos and into solidarity, by the remembering grace of God. Even Jesus experienced that, as in **Mark 1:9–15**. His baptism in the Jordan was followed by a time of testing and, when it concluded, “the fullness of God drew near.” That testing time, begun with baptism, is what the Season of Lent celebrates.

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The natural world carries messages of God’s grace. We will encounter some of these messages in the readings through Lent. Ancient people understood: all creation fell and rose together, what affects one species affects all – human actions have planetary and even cosmic implications. The oneness of creation under God’s grace shines in every rainbow arching through the clouds, a witness to God’s promise that the earth from which we come will never again be reduced to its primordial chaos.

The rainbow also reminds humans that we are part of that earth, sharing its fate with “all living creatures.” Perhaps there is still time for us to “re-member.” In one powerful ritual, the liturgist dips a green branch into the baptismal font, sprays water over the congregation, and calls out “Remember you are baptized.” This Lent begins with remembering, and baptism can be a powerful symbol through the season. We are called to recognize God’s mercy and faithfulness, and to reflect that covenant in solidarity with others, including the non-human creation.

Lent can prompt sober reflection on the brokenness around us. Where can we see violence and division dismembering creation? How are we complicit in that brokenness? And what actions could we begin, in this time and place, that might help us re-member again the covenant of grace?



**Focus scripture**  
**Genesis 9:8–17**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Psalm 25:1–10**  
**1 Peter 3:18–22**  
**Mark 1:9–15**

**O God, we still live in a broken world desperate for the grace of new beginnings. Help us to trust the rainbow sign, and to share the covenant of caring with all creation, in Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

## The Focus for Ages 15–18



Ideas for beginning and ending the church year and other leadership resources are in *From Start to Finish* (go to the Library on the Seasons website).

In their school studies teenagers learn about some of the classic myths and legends created by ancient peoples to explain and give meaning to the world in which they lived. In the flood story found in Genesis they will discover connections with myths about great floods told in other cultures.

Older teenagers are growing in their awareness of what is happening in the wider world and the ways in which these events

intersect with their own lives. As they hear about cataclysmic events in nature, such as the devastation caused by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan in 2011, they may wonder where God is during these times. During this session consider how to make space for questions and concerns that may be expressed by the group. Pray for the members of the group as they begin their journey through this season of inner reflection.

### Prepare

#### Before the session

- Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 9:8–17, and biblical background material (p. 3).
- Review "About this Lent and Easter" (p. 1) and "This Lent, Easter for Ages 15–18" (p. 2).
- To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on Spirit Sightings. Bring information that might inform this week's session.
- Bring Bibles, taper, matches, and basic supply kit (p. 2).
- Bring, if possible, *Lent, Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, *Seasons Songbook (Volume 7)*, *Seasons Music CD (Volume 7)*.

#### Gather

- Set worship space with purple fabric, purple pillar candle; place five strips of construction paper (purple, blue, green, yellow, red) radiating out from the candle with a tealight on each strip.
- Bring piece of broken pottery and copies of resource sheet "Lenten Ritual" (p. 87); save copies for next week.
- Bring, if possible, "To You, O God" (p. 1 in *Music Booklet*, p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, #17 on *Seasons Music CD*).

#### Engage

- Print out the following verses from Genesis, one per slip of paper: 7:24; 8:1; 8:10–11; 8:14–17; and 8:20.
- Option: bring story recording "Rainbow Sign" (in Extra Resources folder on *Ages 15–18 disk*).
- Digging deeper:** copies of this week's resource sheet "Flood Legends" and other information collected from web links.
- Bring poster *Rainbow over Pilbara*.

#### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- Acrostic:** copies of this week's resource sheet "Acrostic Poem," watercolour pencils or pastels
- Mosaic mural:** mural paper, tempera paint, sponge brushes, used magazines
- Lenten service:** information about local or denominational church projects or community projects
- Lenten prayer ritual:** (*ongoing*) recording of meditative music, copies of resource sheet "Praying the Psalms" (p. 88); save copies for coming weeks

#### Bless

- Bring, if possible, "Don't Be Afraid" (p. 4 in *Music Booklet*, p. 15 in *Seasons Songbook*, #2 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- Bring rainbow stickers.



# Blessed Connections

## Scripture

Genesis 9:8–17

**FOCUS** To explore God's promise of renewal for all creation.

## Gather

**Welcome** young people to the season of Lent, a time of prayer and meditation as we prepare to hear the stories of Holy Week and of Easter.

**Gather** around the worship space and point out the new colour purple, symbolic for this season. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Lenten Ritual" (p. 87) and invite two volunteers to lead the group in the Lent 1 gathering prayer and ritual.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, "To You, O God" (p. 1 in the *Music Booklet*, p. 40 in the *Seasons Songbook*, #17 on *Seasons Music CD*).

### Making connections

Invite group members to think of a colour to describe their feelings about the events in their lives this past week.

- **What colour might describe what your world has felt like this week? Why?**
- **What in the world or in your lives seems disconnected or broken at this time?**

Invite participants to write a word or phrase on sticky notes and place these beside the broken pottery in the worship area.

## Engage

### Setting the context

This week's focus scripture is the story of the flood from the book of Genesis. Many cultures have stories and legends about catastrophic floods, stories that were told from generation to generation for thousands of years before being written down. Review the biblical account of Noah and the ark (**Genesis 6:11—7:23**) by inviting group members to share what they can recall, referring to a Bible with chapter headings and subheadings to help recall the story. Distribute verses on the slips of paper (see *Prepare*) and invite volunteers to read these in order, to summarise the last part of the story.

### Scripture reading

Invite two volunteers to read **Genesis 9:8–17**, one as narrator and one as God's voice. Have the group imagine how God's promise would have been heard by a people who were often fearful and uncertain about the natural world.

- **What promises does God make to all of creation?**
- **What difference does it make that the promise is made to "every living creature"?**

In this account we can identify some things that

helped to shape the Hebrew understanding of the nature of God.

- **What does the story of Noah suggest about what the Hebrew people believed about God?**

Explain that the Hebrew term used for the word "covenant" in this story seems to come from a word meaning a "binding relationship." In the Hebrew Scriptures this word described the relationship between the Hebrew people and God. The covenants described in the Bible include promises made by God and sometimes responses expected from the people. Invite the group to notice how many times God's promise (covenant) to all creation is repeated in **Genesis 9:8–17**.

- **What is the promise or covenant made to Noah and all creation?**
- **What does God ask for in return?**

In biblical stories God's promises, or covenants, are sealed with a symbol. In this story that symbol is a rainbow.

- **In what ways is a rainbow a good symbol of God's covenant with all creation?**

*Option:* listen to the recording of the story "Rainbow Sign" and share thoughts about this paraphrase of the passage.

### Digging deeper

Biblical writers borrowed and adapted stories from other faiths. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Flood Legends" (and other materials) and invite participants to read the information. Form pairs to discuss the questions, and then share thoughts as a whole group.

### Connecting scripture with life

**Art engagement** In the biblical story of Noah, a rainbow is a sign of God's promise to humanity. Invite young people to look at the poster *Rainbow*

*over Pilbara* and use some or all of the following questions to explore this image: Where do you see warmth in this painting? What movement do you see? Where are your eyes drawn? What do you notice about the rainbow? Where would you like to be standing in this picture? Why? Share your own stories of seeing rainbows.

■ **Where do we see signs of God's faithfulness in all creation?**

■ **In what ways does our relationship with God change the way we live in the world?**

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## Respond

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Choose one or more of the following options.

- Acrostic** The focus passage invites us to reflect on God's covenant. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Acrostic Poem." Invite group members to use the suggestions to reflect on God's covenant and God's mercy and faithfulness and write their own poems expressing these themes, and decorate their poems using the art supplies.
- Mosaic mural** In the Genesis story the rainbow becomes a sign of God's promise. Invite young people to create a mural based on this promise. Have them find pictures of pain and suffering of people and the environment in magazines and cut these images up into small squares. Then have them paint a rainbow onto a sheet of mural paper and place the cut-up squares on the layers of wet paint, transforming these negative images into a rainbow mosaic of hope.
- Lenten service** Lent is a traditional time to reflect on how we care for others and to wit-



ness to God's promises through serving. At this time of year, many churches and denominations have fundraising projects to support outreach work in their country and overseas. If your congregation has a special offering during Lent, explain the purpose or distribute information about denominational projects and review together. Invite participants to commit to one project as a group or share ideas for raising funds which individual members might do during the season.

- Lenten prayer ritual (ongoing)** Invite young people to take time to meditate this week on a reading from the Psalms. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Praying the Psalms" (p. 88). Play a recording of meditative music and invite the group to follow the suggestions for Week one. Encourage them to continue to spend time meditating on this psalm reading during the week.

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## Bless

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**Gather** around the worship area. Invite group members to look again at the poster *Rainbow over Pilbara* as you read **Genesis 9:13**. Then invite them to take turns naming that promise by giving each other rainbow stickers and saying, "God's promise is for you."

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, "Don't Be Afraid" (p. 4 in the *Music Booklet*, p. 15 in the *Seasons Songbook*, #2 on the *Seasons Music CD*).

**Close your session** by inviting two volunteers to lead the group in the Blessing prayer and ritual for Lent 1 on the resource sheet "Lenten Ritual" (p. 87).

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## Reflect

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What insights were expressed by group members in today's session? How might you help young people to continue exploring their relationship with God?



# Flood Legends

**From Assyria** The gods agreed that the world was overpopulated and decided to send a great flood to cleanse the earth. One of the gods, Ea, felt sorry for the people and warned one of them in a dream. Utnapishtim and some craftsmen built a large boat (one acre in area, seven decks) in a week and loaded it with their families and all living things of the earth. Violent winds and rain stormed the earth for six days and nights. Even the gods were frightened by the flood's fury. On the seventh day the boat landed on a mountain peak. Seven days later, Utnapishtim sent out first a dove and then a sparrow, but they returned because there was nowhere to land. Finally a raven was sent, and when it did not return Utnapishtim knew that the waters had gone down enough. People and animals left the boat. Utnapishtim made a sacrifice to the gods and he and his wife were given eternal life.

**From India** One day Manu, the first human, found a small fish in his wash water. The fish begged protection from the larger fishes and in return promised it would save Manu. Manu kept the fish safe, and one day the fish warned Manu there would be a flood and told him to build a ship. As the flood waters rose, the fish came and Manu tied the ship to its horn. The fish led him to a northern mountain and Manu, alone of all creatures, survived. Manu made an offering of butter, sour milk, whey, and curds to the gods.

**From China** A large bird once quarrelled with the crab and pecked a hole in its skull (which can still be seen today). In revenge, the crab made the sea and rivers swell until the waters reached the sky. The only survivors were a brother and sister who took a pair of all kinds of animals with them in a huge chest. They floated for seven days and nights. Finally the spirits sent a rooster to crow as a signal that the flood waters had gone down. The birds came out of the chest first, then the animals, then the brother and sister. They were worried because they had eaten all the rice. However, a black ant brought two grains of rice. The brother planted them, and the whole plain was covered with a rice crop the very next morning.

**From Sumatra** When the earth grew old and dirty, Debata, the Creator, sent a flood to destroy every living thing. The last pair of humans took refuge on top of the highest mountain. The flood had already reached their knees, when Debata regretted the decision to destroy everything. Debata tied a clod of earth to a thread and lowered it in front of the people. They stepped onto it and were saved. As the couple and their descendants multiplied, the clod became bigger and bigger, finally becoming the earth we live in today.

**From North America** Kunyan (which means "Wise Man") predicted the possibility of a flood and built a great raft. He told other people, but they laughed at him. A great flood came, with water gushing from all sides, rising higher than the trees and drowning everything except Kunyan and his family. As Kunyan floated, he gathered pairs of all the animals and birds he met. The earth disappeared under the waters, and for a long time no one thought to look for it. Then the muskrat dived into the water and could smell the earth but couldn't reach it. Next the beaver tried and came back, unconscious but holding a little mud. Kunyan placed the mud on the water and breathed on it, making it grow larger and larger. By the seventh day the land was as large as it was before the flood, and the animals and people got off the raft.

## *For discussion:*

- In what ways are these stories similar to the account in Genesis?
- In what ways do they differ?
- How are the gods portrayed in these legends?
- What do the flood stories say about how people viewed God in ancient times?
- How does our understanding of the nature of God differ?

**Further reflection:** For more information about flood stories in cultures around the world visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on Links; Lent, Easter 2012; February 26, 2012; Ages 15–18.



# Acrostic Poem

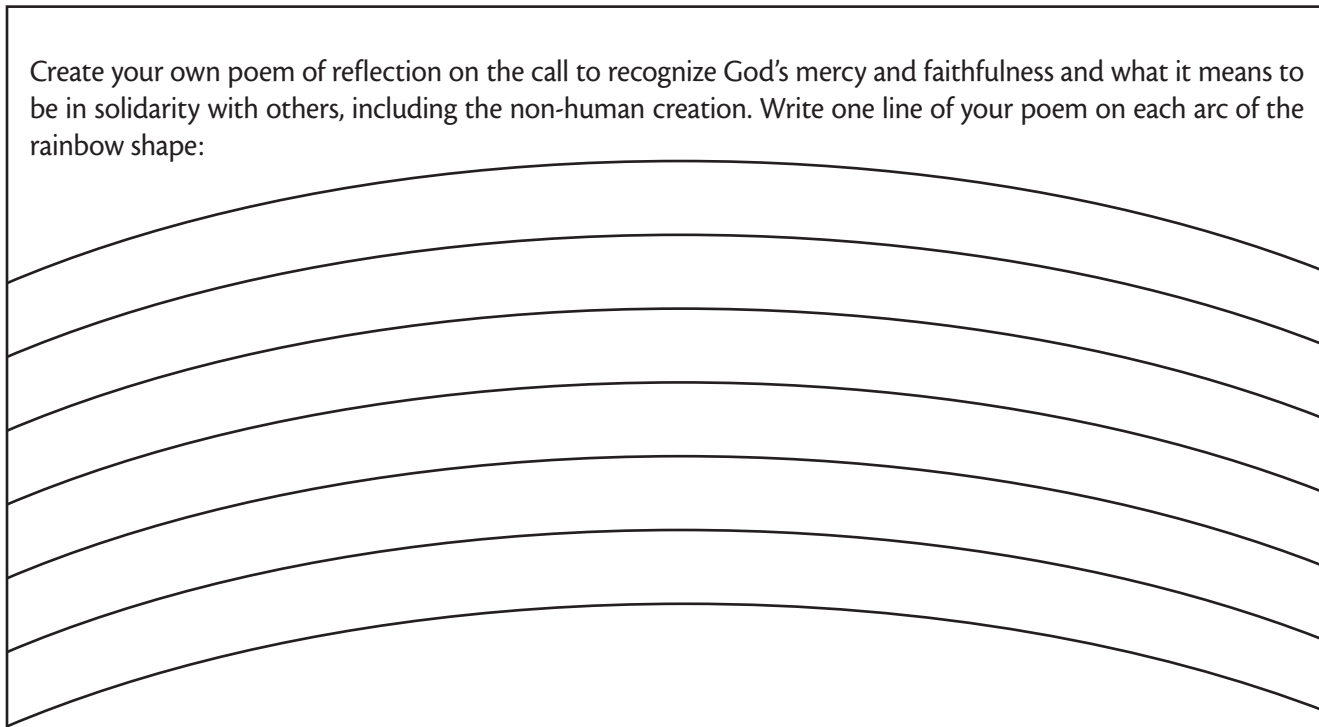
**“I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”** *(Genesis 9:13)*

Every time we care for the earth and for each other, we are sharing in the covenant of caring with all creation.

Where do you see signs of God’s faithfulness in the community of believers and in the natural world of creation? Write some of your observations as a poem using the letters of the word “Covenant” as the first letters of each word or phrase.

C \_\_\_\_\_  
O \_\_\_\_\_  
V \_\_\_\_\_  
E \_\_\_\_\_  
N \_\_\_\_\_  
A \_\_\_\_\_  
N \_\_\_\_\_  
T \_\_\_\_\_

Create your own poem of reflection on the call to recognize God’s mercy and faithfulness and what it means to be in solidarity with others, including the non-human creation. Write one line of your poem on each arc of the rainbow shape:



# Living Legacy

The readings for the second Sunday in Lent focus on another covenant: the promise God made to Abram and to Sarai. Again, we are reminded that such promises of faithful relationship are initiated by God, not based on merit or worth, with the purpose of bringing blessing to all the earth.

## Focus scripture: Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16

Abraham is the ancestor of “a multitude of nations” Christians share the Abrahamic tradition with Jews and Muslims. All three faiths count Abraham as their literal or spiritual ancestor, and all three recognize Abraham’s line as a legacy of divine grace.

The promise came to Abram and Sarai when they had no grounds to expect it. In a time of settled retirement, Abram and Sarai are called to leave all they know and journey into alien land: a land where God will help them find true home. We all share a reliance on that grace. We are not chosen through our own merit, yet we can respond in gracious thanks. Churches baptize infants partly on the grounds that God, whose grace incorporates us into a covenant people, does not wait for our ability to understand or respond: grace comes before we are ready to receive it or comprehend what it might mean.

As though to underscore this, the Genesis tradition enshrines God’s generous grace to the two mothers through whom Abraham’s legacy descends. Sarah is honoured and blessed with no preconditions. Abraham is required to walk blameless to receive God’s blessing, while Sarah does not. God blesses her before any actions deserve it.

Later in the story, when Hagar is twice treated badly by that same Sarah (her harshness does not negate God’s commitment), God appears twice to Hagar to assure her – in a way that no other woman in Hebrew Scriptures hears God’s message – that she and her child Ishmael are blessed and loved by God and will be protected from death.

The insight that not only Israel receives God’s blessing is picked up in the radiant conclusion to **Psalm 22:23–31**. Sometimes called “The Psalm of Christ” (for having been quoted by Jesus on the cross), this song begins with abandonment and despair and finishes with a vision of “all the families of nations” together in worship. Grace overwhelms despair.

In **Romans 4:13–25**, Paul struggles to put this grace into words. His experience of how adherence to law can become an empty shell drove him to divide “law” from “faith” as though the law brings no goodness. Yet the Jewish tradition recognized Torah law, the way that brings life, as itself a gift of divine grace. Faith is a response to, not the prerequisite for, that gracious promise. There is an interesting parallel between this Jewish understanding of Torah law and the relationship that Indigenous Australians have with what they call “law” which is also characterized by a sense of receiving the law as a gift and responding to it faithfully.

God’s free gift of life must be received in order to be experienced, and grace always invites a response. **Mark 8:31–38** and **Mark 9:2–9** both remind us that resurrection comes after suffering and death; and we must be ready to follow.



The Abrahamic Covenant reminds us God owes us nothing: the favour we receive comes undeserved. Apostles who heard Jesus’ call to take up the cross cannot argue they are not heroic enough for that call. God strengthened Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, and God will also companion us on the road to life.

Baptism calls us to respond to grace by living gracious lives, believing that God will be with us in all that unfolds. It may be a long life full of honour; it may be execution at the hands of evil empires; but God goes with us through it all, and is faithful.

Perhaps the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar is told in three religions in order to ensure that all of us together can keep faith as God has done. Baptism radically enlarges our family ties. As we “rise new” from the water we become kin to the baptized ones across all world history. What does this mean in practice? How do we show our kinship with the children of Abraham and Sarah in every land, and with the God who loves all creation as God loves us?



**Focus scripture**  
**Genesis 17:1–7,**  
**15–16**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Psalm 22:23–31**  
**Romans 4:13–25**  
**Mark 8:31–38 or**  
**Mark 9:2–9**

**Loving God of all generations, your grace is overwhelming. Help us to keep covenant with you in our kinship with one another, and honour your call by loving service. For we ask this in the name of one who conquered death itself, Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

## The Focus for Ages 15–18



Ideas for beginning and ending the church year and other leadership resources are in *From Start to Finish* (go to the Library on the *Seasons* website).

Though peer groups are important, family members still play an important role in the lives of older teenagers. They may enjoy hearing family stories or knowing that they share a grandparent's name. Those who have grown up in the church probably have a sense of God's presence in their lives though they might wonder how God's promises are lived out today. They may be disappointed or angry with God for not doing

what they think God ought to be doing in the world.

As they explore the story of Abraham and Sarah, one of the foundational stories of faith, they will have an opportunity to share these thoughts as they examine how God is present and active in their own lives and in the world. Pray that young people will live in trust of God's presence and promise in their lives.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- Prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16; Psalm 22:23–31; and biblical background material (p. 9).
- To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on Spirit Sightings. Bring information that might inform this week's session.
- Set the worship space with purple fabric, pillar candle with strips of construction paper and tealights.
- Bring a star symbol and copies of resource sheet "Lenten Ritual" (p. 87); save copies for next week.
- Bring Bibles, taper, matches, and basic supply kit (p. 2).
- Bring, if possible, *Lent, Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, *Seasons Songbook (Volume 7)*, *Seasons Music CD (Volume 7)*.

### Gather

- Bring, if possible, "To You, O God" (p. 1 in *Music Booklet*, p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, #17 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- Bring poster *Rainbow over Pilbara*.

### Engage

- Bring copies of top section of this week's resource sheet "Trusting the Promise."

- Bring answer to "Why do biblical names change?" from "Ask the Rabbi" (in Action Zone at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca)).
- Bring poster *Old Woman in Prayer*.
- Option: bring story recording "A Promise to Abraham and Sarah" (in Extra Resources folder on *Ages 15–18 disk*).
- Digging deeper:** copies of this week's resource sheet "A Common Ancestry"

### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- Reflection:** copies of bottom section of resource sheet "Trusting the Promise"
- Symbols:** craft supplies (leather lacing or shoe laces, beads, pipe cleaners, buttons)
- Interfaith project:** copies of resource sheet "Projects" (p. 89)
- Lenten prayer ritual:** (*ongoing*) recording of meditative music, copies of resource sheet "Praying the Psalms" (p. 88); save copies for coming weeks.

### Bless

- Bring bowl of small metallic or foil stars, one per person.
- Bring, if possible, "Don't Be Afraid" (p. 4 in *Music Booklet*, p. 15 in *Seasons Songbook*, #2 on *Seasons Music CD*).



# Living Legacy

## Scripture

Genesis 17:1–7,  
15–16

**FOCUS** To reflect on the ways we live our lives in God's presence.

## Gather

**Welcome** young people to the second Sunday in the season of Lent. Invite them to share some experiences from the past week.

**Gather** around the worship space. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Lenten Ritual" (p. 87) and invite two volunteers to lead the group in the Lent 2 gathering prayer and ritual.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, "To You, O God" (p. 1 in the *Music Booklet*, p. 40 in the *Seasons Songbook*, #17 on *Seasons Music CD*).

## Making connections

Invite group members to look at the poster *Rainbow over Pilbara* and recall last week's story of God's rainbow promise to all creation. Invite young people to think about what it means to make a promise, and to think about promises they have made. Possible questions to include in the discussion: What are some promises that you make to parents, to friends, to siblings, to teachers? What promises do people make to you?

## Engage

### Setting the scene

Explain that this week's reading, part of the story of Abraham and Sarah, comes later in Genesis, after the story of Noah explored last week. The story of Abraham and Sarah is the longest story in the Hebrew Scriptures. Distribute copies of the top section ("A short history of Abram and Sarai") from the resource sheet "Trusting the Promise." Invite young people to work in pairs to look up the biblical references and fill in the blanks to discover the background for this week's reading.

■ **What is the theme of God's promise to Abram and Sarai?**

### Scripture reading

Twenty-four years after they had first heard God's promise, Abram and Sarai still didn't have any children. Invite two volunteers to read **Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16**, taking the roles of narrator and God's voice.

■ **What new details are now added to the promise?**

■ **What makes these promises different from the previous experiences of promise?**

Look again at **Genesis 17:1** and explain that in the phrase "walk before me," the Hebrew word for "walk" is *hitpael*, which means "to walk

about" or "to live out one's life." Abraham and Sarah and their descendants are invited to live out their lives in God's presence

■ **What will it mean for Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants to live out their lives in the presence of God?**

Look again at **Genesis 17:15–16** and share, from "Ask the Rabbi," the answer to the question, "Why do biblical names change?" The new names, Abraham and Sarah, were a sign of God's action in their lives. Invite a volunteer to read **Genesis 21:2–3** to see how God's promise was fulfilled.

Ask volunteers to read aloud **Genesis 17:17** from several versions of the Bible.

■ **How would you explain Abraham's reaction?**

**Art engagement** Look together at the poster *Old Woman in Prayer* and invite young people to imagine that this woman is Sarai praying. Notice the expression on the woman's face.

■ **What would make it hard for Sarai and Abram to keep trusting that God's promise would be fulfilled?**

*Option:* listen to the recording of the story "A Promise to Abraham and Sarah" and share thoughts about this paraphrase of the passage.

### Digging deeper

God's promise to Abraham and Sarah in **Genesis 17:4, 16** indicates that Abraham and Sarah will be ancestors of a multitude of nations. Form pairs or small groups and distribute copies of the resource sheet "A Common Ancestry." Invite each group to review the information and to make a list of questions they have about the joys and challenges of interfaith relationships. Share these with the

entire group and discuss together the questions at the bottom of the resource sheet.

### Connecting scripture with life

Abraham and Sarah believed and trusted in the promise of God's presence in their lives. We are also called to live out our lives in God's presence.

■ **How might we show with words and actions that God is present and active in our lives?**

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## Respond

Choose one or two of the following options.

- ❑ **Reflection** We are called to live into God's intention for us. Distribute paper and copies of the bottom section of the resource sheet "Trusting the Promise," and invite young people to use the questions to reflect on what it means to live in God's presence.
- ❑ **Symbols** The rainbow in the story of Noah and stars in the story of Sarah and Abraham were signs of God's presence and promise. Invite young people to use the craft supplies to create symbols that will remind them of God's presence and promise in their lives. These can be used as zipper pulls for backpacks or other bags.
- ❑ **Interfaith project** Despite having a founding figure in common (Abraham) there has been misunderstanding and antagonism between



Christians, Muslims, and Jews over the centuries. Interfaith dialogue is helping to build bridges of understanding and respect. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Projects" (p. 89) and review information on "Interfaith connections." Make plans to participate in one of these ideas. Encourage young people to investigate the links on the *Seasons* website.

- ❑ **Lenten prayer ritual** (*ongoing*) Invite young people to take time to meditate this week on a reading from the Psalms. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Praying the Psalms" (p. 88). Play a recording of meditative music and invite the group to follow the suggestions for Week two. Encourage them to continue to spend time meditating on this psalm reading during the week.

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## Bless

**Gather** around the worship area. Invite group members to spend a few moments looking at the poster *Rainbow over Pilbara* as they think again about God's promise of blessings and faithful relationships. Pass around a small bowl of stars and invite participants to take turns giving one of the stars to another, offering this blessing: "May you discover God's blessings this week, blessings as

many as the stars."

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, "Don't Be Afraid" (p. 4 in the *Music Booklet*, p. 15 in the *Seasons Songbook*, #2 on the *Seasons Music CD*).

**Close your session** by inviting two volunteers to lead the group in the Blessing prayer and ritual for Lent 2 on the resource sheet "Lenten Ritual" (p. 87).

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## Reflect

What insights did young people express about God's promises to Sarah and Abraham and to themselves? In what ways can you continue to affirm for the members of your group the presence and promise of God in their lives?



# TRUSTING THE PROMISE

## **A short history of Abram and Sarai**

- Abram's father, \_\_\_\_\_, is listed as one of the descendants from Noah's family. (*Genesis 11:27*)
- Abram and Sarai left their home in \_\_\_\_\_ with their family to go to Canaan but settled instead in \_\_\_\_\_. (*Genesis 11:31*)
- After Abram's father died, God called Abram and Sarai to continue on to Canaan. They began their long journey of faith when Abraham was \_\_\_\_ years old. (*Genesis 12:4*)
- Because of a famine Abram and Sarai took a detour and settled in \_\_\_\_\_ for a while. (*Genesis 12:10*)
- Years later they finally did reach the land of Canaan, and settled in an area called \_\_\_\_\_. (*Genesis 13:18*)
- Abraham and Sarah heard God's promise a number of times. (*Genesis 12:2; 13:15-16; 15:5; 15:18*) Write on the back of this sheet what God's words of promise were each time.

## God's Promise - My Promise

God said to Abraham and Sarah, "walk before me..." (*Genesis 17:1b*) This is like God saying, "I want you to live out your life in my presence." Imagine that God is saying this to you today.

■ **What is one thing you already do to show that you are living out your life in God's presence?**

■ **What is something else you might do to show that you are living out your life in God's presence?**

God also said to Abraham and Sarah, "I will make my covenant between me and you..." (*Genesis 17:2*). Imagine that God is making this promise to you today.

■ **What might be some of the things that God promises you?**

■ **What are some of the things that you might promise God?**

■ **In what ways have I or am I experiencing God's presence in my life?**

■ **In what ways am I living out my life in God's presence?**



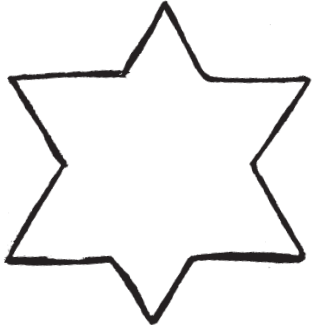
# A Common Ancestry

God promised Abraham and Sarah that their children would continue through many generations. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all honour Abraham as the ancestor of their faith. All three religions use a star as

a symbol.

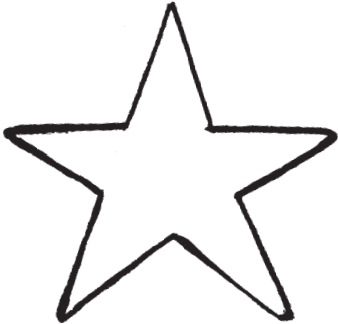
## The six-pointed star

Jews believe that they are the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, the great nation that God had promised Abram and Sarai in the covenant. The six-pointed star has been a symbol for the Jewish nation for a long time, sometimes called the "Star of David." Some say it represents the six days of creation. Some say it symbolizes God's rule over the six directions: North, South, East, West, up, and down. Today it has become a symbol of unity for Jewish people and an international symbol of courage and resistance.



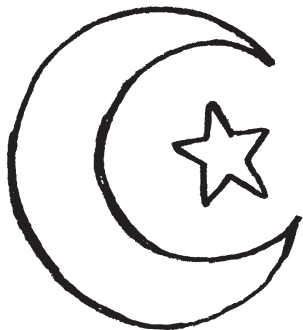
## The five-pointed star

For Christian believers, Abraham and Sarah received the promise of God and became the forerunners of those who believe in God through Jesus. The five-pointed star is an ancient symbol for Christians. It is sometimes called the "Star of Bethlehem," a reminder of the story of Jesus' birth, or the "Epiphany star," a reminder of the story of the magi coming to Bethlehem. It has been found on broken clay fragments from as early as 400 BCE.



## The star and crescent

For Muslims (people of the Islamic faith), Ibrihim (Abraham) is a prophet and the ancestor of Muhammad, the great prophet of Allah (God). Muslims remember Ibrihim in their prayers and see him as the first who believed the truth that there is only one God. The combination of a five-pointed star and a crescent moon is the symbol of Islam. It is an ancient symbol that was used in central Asia and Siberia thousands of years before Islam. The crescent is the new moon and is a reminder to spend time in prayer and devotion to God.



- When tension erupts between world faiths how might we live out our call to be peacemakers?
- What are some things we can do to encourage respect among the descendants of Abraham?

**Further reflection:** To learn more about the symbol of the star in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, visit the Seasons website, [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca), and click on Links; Lent, Easter 2012; March 4, 2012; Ages 15–18.

# Cosmic Law

Classical music loves the words of Psalm 19: Beethoven and Handel both wrote glorious music using these verses. Yet most attention focuses on the first half of the psalm, the cosmic law preaching to all the world “the glory of God.” The second half that praises Torah and its Covenant Creator has not been served so reverently. Both forms of Law come from the same loving Creator.

## Focus scripture: Psalm 19

The Western world makes a distinction between cosmic law and human law(s), as though only the first came from divine inspiration. Most cultures would see that split as simply wrong. Some indigenous groups understand that the life-rules for human society come from the same divine Creator and follow the same universal principles, as the life-rules from which creation springs forth. This view is often shared by classical Chinese religions and the Hebrew Scriptures.

Observing creation, its rhythms in days and seasons, its ecological balance, its enduring harmony between individual self-expression and kin-based cooperation, can give us insight into how we live fruitfully together. The harmony of creation is meant to guide the harmony of human society.

The lectionary reminds us of this truth by linking **Psalm 19** and the Exodus covenant, **Exodus 20:1–17**. The God who rescued Earth from chaos and the Hebrews from slavery, sends the law to guide us along the path together. In the intriguing passage in **John 2:13–22**, Jesus reads his own fate into the destiny of the Jerusalem temple. Human actions are deeply intertwined with cosmic consequences.

Paul interprets this in an ironic way in **1 Corinthians 1:18–25**. Paul points to the irony

that the gospel he proclaims is centred on the crucifixion (and thus also the resurrection) of Jesus Christ. This seems utter foolishness to those who do not understand God’s workings. If we are not in tune with God, it is indeed hard to understand God’s ways.

Humans have understood the harmony of microcosm / macrocosm. All our scientific ideas rest on this foundation: what is true at the level of stars and planets must be true at the level of creatures and cells. Scripture assures us that God has created a cosmic harmony. We can believe what the heavens tell us; and we can practice that truth in our lives together. There is no separation between social law and natural law – both sides of the one reality are gifts of divine grace.

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The law that God gives in Exodus 20:1–7 and that is celebrated in Psalm 19, seeks harmony among people and between people and God. Practicing this law gives life and creates the energy of community. This is also how the cosmos works; enormous life-giving energy operating harmoniously within the cosmic laws of God. God is constant in all God’s work and God’s creative action and grace can be seen at the level of the massive in a galaxy of a billion stars or the level of the minute in a single gene.



**Focus scripture**  
**Psalm 19**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Exodus 20:1–7**  
**1 Corinthians 1:18–25**  
**John 2:13–22**

**The heavens sing out your glory, O God, and your grace shines new each day. Help us live out such grace in our harmony with one another, and experience again the wonder of your presence in every person we encounter; in Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

## The Focus for Ages 15–18

Most teenagers and young adults consider the protection of the environment to be very important, often placing concern for the environment above that of social justice. Young people have been at the forefront of movements to reverse or at least stay the course of global warming. The focus scripture reading from the psalms this week can encourage young people to recognize more profoundly how God’s ways are proclaimed in creation and can be expressed in faithful living. It offers an opportunity for the members of your group to define the value systems and ways of living that are faithful to God’s intent for the world.

The focus passage then moves on to explore God’s law. For many teens the idea of

following any law may be burdensome. They may have had experiences when religion was seen to be primarily a matter of rules and regulations, many of which were almost impossible to keep. Those in your group might find it a challenge to imagine God’s law as something that is “sweeter than honey” and something that “revives the soul,” as described by the psalmist. You can encourage discussion which will help group members to explore more deeply what it means to live in God’s ways, particularly when they are in contrast with the ways or wisdom of the world. Pray that young people will discover anew the ways in which God’s law is life-giving, a gift which gives wisdom, new insight, and joy.

### Prepare

#### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Exodus 20:1–17, Psalm 19, and biblical background material (p. 15).
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on Spirit Sightings. Bring information that might inform this week’s session.
- ❑ Set the worship space with purple fabric, pillar candle with strips of construction paper and tealights.
- ❑ Bring a green branch and copies of resource sheet “Lenten Ritual” (p. 87); save copies for next week.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, taper, matches, and basic supply kit (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Lent, Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, *Seasons Songbook (Volume 7)*, *Seasons Music CD (Volume 7)*.

#### Gather

- ❑ Bring, if possible, “To You, O God” (p. 1 in *Music Booklet*, p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, #17 on *Seasons Music CD*).

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring copies of this week’s resource sheets “From the Rabbi” and “God’s Wise Ways.”

- ❑ Bring slices of apple, dish of honey, spoons, plates.
- ❑ Option: bring story recording “God’s Great Universe Song” (in Extra Resources folder on *Ages 15–18 disk*).

#### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Images:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Art engagement:** posters *Cap Stump* and *Rainbow over Pilbara*, article “About the Art for this Lent, Easter” (p. 95), mural paper, art supplies
- ❑ **Tile images:** white ceramic tiles, permanent markers, acrylic paints, paint brushes, self-adhesive hooks
- ❑ **Lenten prayer ritual:** (*ongoing*) recording of meditative music, copies of resource sheet “Praying the Psalms” (p. 88); save copies for coming weeks.

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring poster *Person at the Window*.
- ❑ Bring “Listen Now for the Gospel” (p. 9 in *Music Booklet*; p. 23 in *Seasons Songbook*; #25 on *Seasons Music CD*); recording and lyrics available in Extra Resources folder on *Ages 15–18 disk*.



# Cosmic Law

## Scripture

Psalm 19

**FOCUS** To deepen our understanding of God's law and God's ways.

## Gather

**Welcome** young people and invite them to share some experiences from the past week.

**Gather** around the worship space. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Lenten Ritual" (p. 87) and invite two volunteers to lead the group in the Lent 3 gathering prayer and ritual.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, "To You, O God" (p. 1 in the *Music Booklet*, p. 40 in the *Seasons Songbook*,

#17 on *Seasons Music CD*).

### Making connections

Invite group members to name some of the rules or laws that they follow in their daily lives (for example, traffic rules, rules of etiquette, dress codes, game rules in sports).

- **What is helpful about rules and regulations?**
- **When do rules or laws feel restrictive? Why?**

## Engage

### Setting the scene

This week's reading comes from the book of Psalms which were songs or poems. **Psalm 19** was probably used as a teaching psalm encouraging people to learn about God by observing creation and God's ways or laws.

### Scripture reading

Invite the group to read **Psalm 19:1–6**, each person reading a verse in turn.

- **What does the psalmist say about the universe?**
- **In what ways can creation speak of God's glory without saying a word?**

Form two groups and give each group one of the following sections: **Psalm 19:7–9** and **Psalm 19:10–11**. Ask them to record words that describe God's law. Share responses together.

- **How is God's law described? What do these images say about God's law?**

The Hebrew people's idea of God's law (Torah) was more about an ongoing relationship with God than a static set of rules or laws. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "From the Rabbi" and invite group members to read the first section.

- **How does Rabbi Morris' description of the function of Torah differ from what the psalm says?**

The image of God's law as "sweeter than honey" from Psalm 19 is included in the Jewish celebration of Rosh Hashanah.

Invite the group to read the information on the resource sheet "From the Rabbi" and participate in the ritual.

- **What do you think it means to say "God's law is sweeter than honey"? Would you agree?**

Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 19:12–14**. The psalmist knows that it is not always easy to follow God's ways.

- **For what does the psalmist ask in these verses?**  
*Option:* listen to the recording of the story "God's Great Universe Song" and share thoughts about this paraphrase of the passage.

### Digging deeper

Invite a volunteer to read another text for today, **Exodus 20:1–17**. Explain that a covenant in the Near East often began with an account of what one partner had done for the other.

- **What is the first commandment? How is it the foundation for all the other commandments?**

One-third of this passage concerns itself with the first commandment, yet many commentators have suggested that to fully live the first commandment is to keep completely and rightly the rest of the commandments.

- **What gods are trying to get your attention and loyalty today?**
- **What happens when God's way of living is abandoned for the sake of personal gain?**

Distribute copies of the resource sheet “God’s Wise Ways” and invite the group to look at the “new” commandments.

- **How do these new commandments help you to understand what it means to live in God’s ways?**

### Connecting scripture with life

The psalm begins by proclaiming the glory of God in the creation and it ends with the affirmation that this creator God thoroughly loves and cares for each individual.

- **To what extent do you think God is involved in the intricacies of creating the universe and in your own joys and sorrows, hopes and dreams?**

The readings for this week encourage us to deepen our understanding of what it means to live in God’s wise ways.

- **What could the world be like if all people lived according to God’s law or way?**

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## Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Images** The writer of Psalm 19 uses different images to describe the beauty and joy of knowing and following God’s wise ways. Invite group members to consider their own images of God’s way. Read aloud the sentence starters at the bottom of the resource sheet “God’s Wise Ways” and invite participants to take turns completing the sentences by adding their own words or phrases. If time permits, brainstorm aloud some more images.
- **Art engagement** Psalm 19 tells us that creation proclaims the glory of God. Invite the group to look at the poster *Cap Stump*, explaining what this is. Imagine together how much time it might have taken the artist to create this “nature picture.” Then look together at the poster *Rainbow over Pilbara*, a different image of creation. Invite young people to use the art supplies and create their own images of “voice of creation”



from Psalm 19:1–6. Display these together to form a large mural.

- **Tile images** Psalm 19 speaks of God’s laws as reviving the soul and enlightening the eyes. Distribute ceramic tiles and invite young people to use permanent markers to write a phrase from the psalm on their tiles. Have them use the acrylic paints to decorate around the words, perhaps using images from the first six verses of Psalm 19. Attach self-adhesive hooks to the backs of the finished tiles to display as reminders of the wise ways of God.
- **Lenten prayer ritual** (*ongoing*) Invite young people to take time to meditate this week on a reading from the Psalms. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Praying the Psalms” (p. 88). Play a recording of meditative music and invite the group to follow the suggestions for Week three. Encourage them to continue to spend time meditating on this psalm reading during the week.

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## Bless

**Gather** around the worship area. Invite group members to spend a few moments looking at the poster *Person at the Window* as you read again the “Ten new commandments” section of the resource sheet “God’s Wise Ways.”

**Sing or listen to** “Listen Now for the Gospel” (p. 9 in the *Music Booklet*; p. 23 in the *Seasons Songbook*;

#25 on the *Seasons Music CD*); recording and lyrics available in Extra Resources folder on *Ages 15–18 disk*.

**Close your session** by inviting two volunteers to lead the group in the Blessing prayer and ritual for Lent 3 on the resource sheet “Lenten Ritual” (p. 87).

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## Reflect

In what ways did group members show an understanding of God’s beautiful law? How did they come to understand the ways in which God’s law could be expressed in their living?



# From the Rabbi

**Q** What is the significance of the Torah to Jews?

**A** Rabbi Lawrence Kushner was showing his preschool students the Holy Ark – the place where the scroll of the Torah resides. The tour ran short and Rabbi Kushner promised that next time he would open the curtain to the Holy Ark and they would look at what was inside. The teacher later informed him that such a hasty conclusion had generated a heated discussion among the children about what exactly was in the ark “behind the curtains.” One child thought it was empty. Another suggested that behind that curtain was “a brand new car”! Another correctly guessed that it held scrolls of the Torah. But one child said, “You’re all wrong. When the rabbi opens that curtain next week, there will just be a big mirror.”

That is it – the answer of that four year old! For Jews the Torah is the mirror we use to look at our souls. Think about how you use a mirror when you get up in the morning – you examine yourself to see what looks okay, to see what blemishes are there that can be fixed, what ones cannot be fixed, and to make sure that your attempts to fix some were successful. For Jews, the Torah is the sacred tool we have to examine our souls – who we are and who we want to become.

**Q** What is Rosh Hashanah?

**A** Rosh Hashanah is the celebration of the Jewish New Year that occurs every year in September or October. It is the beginning of a holy period of ten days called the Days of Awe. These ten days are a check-up time for Jews. We examine the choices we have made, how we have treated other people, how we have acted to make the world a better place. All of us have some things we have done well, but all of us have things that we need to improve upon. For those things, we ask for forgiveness and work toward being better and making the world a better place.

**Ritual** During Rosh Hashanah, there is a ritual of eating apples with honey and praying.

After dipping the apple in honey: “Blessed are you, Lord our God, who creates the fruit of the tree.”

After eating: “May it be your will, God and God of our ancestors, to renew on us a good and sweet year.”

*Rabbi Morris, from “Ask the Rabbi” on the Action Zone of the Seasons website ([www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca))*



# God's Wise Ways

## Ten New Commandants for the 21st Century

- 1 Believe in a Good Presence in your life. Call that Good Presence: God, G-D – and follow that Good presence so that you live life fully – tolerantly, collaboratively, generously and with dignity.
- 2 Believe in a God-Presence in your life that will lift you constantly to live harmoniously in yourself and with others, always searching for your best health and happiness.
- 3 Take care of your home, your environments, your Planet and its vital resources for the life and health of people in all the world.
- 4 Be kind and caring of the animals, the birds, and the creatures of land and the rivers and the seas.
- 5 Help people develop their potential and become as fully functioning human beings as is possible from birth, through traumas and triumph to the end of their days.
- 6 Be magnanimous and excessive in your support of good causes, and use your affluence and material goods and scientific skills in altruistic concern for the future of the world.
- 7 Study ways to encourage and sustain the dignity, hope and integrity of all human beings and study ways to help all human beings embrace their dignity, hope, and integrity.
- 8 Be alive to new possibilities, new ways, and to the unfolding mysteries and wonders of life and the world.
- 9 We often focus our lives on many things and pursuits that promise our fulfilment. Study the deeper things of the Spirit, and the things of ultimate concern for all human beings. Be part of an evolving life-enhancing Faith that will also bring a new resilience to the future.
- 10 Take time to worship the great Source of all the positive transforming energies of life, and search to be at one with “the spirit of the good, the tender and the beautiful.”

From *The New Faith and the 10 New Commandments* by Dr. Francis Macnab, Executive Minister, St. Michaels Uniting Church, Collins St., Melbourne. Used by permission.

## *Sentence starters*

*God's love is as powerful as...*

*God's peace is as deep as...*

*God's rules are as fair as...*

*God's ways are as beautiful as...*

*God's law is...*

# Lenten Ritual

## Lent 1

### Gathering prayer

**One:** As we enter the Season of Lent, we open our hearts to God. (*Light central candle.*)

**Two:** The colour purple reminds us of the wounded and broken places in our lives and the world. (*Place broken pottery on purple strip.*)

**All:** In this Lenten season, may we draw closer to God. Amen.

### Blessing prayer

**One:** When we are in times of change,

**Two:** God promises to be there with us. (*Light a tealight and place beside broken pottery.*)

**All:** We go out into the world, trusting in God's promise. Amen.

## Lent 2

### Gathering prayer

**One:** As we continue through the Season of Lent, we open our hearts to God. (*Light central candle.*)

**Two:** The colour blue reminds us of the blessings, and times of new beginnings. (*Place star on blue strip.*)

**All:** In this Lenten season, may we draw closer to God. Amen.

### Blessing prayer

**One:** When we sometimes lose hope,

**Two:** God promises to be there with us. (*Light a tealight and place beside star.*)

**All:** We go out into the world, trusting in God's promise. Amen.

## Lent 3

### Gathering prayer

**One:** As we continue through the Season of Lent, we open our hearts to God. (*Light central candle.*)

**Two:** The colour green reminds us of God's way that brings new life. (*Place branch on green strip.*)

**All:** In this Lenten season, may we draw closer to God. Amen.

### Blessing prayer

**One:** When we aren't sure of the right thing to do,

**Two:** God promises to be there with us. (*Light a tealight and place beside branch.*)

**All:** We go out into the world, trusting in God's promise. Amen.

## Lent 4

### Gathering prayer

**One:** As we continue through the Season of Lent, we open our hearts to God. (*Light central candle.*)

**Two:** The colour yellow reminds us of God's healing love, bringing hope and transformation. (*Place container of salve on yellow strip.*)

**All:** In this Lenten season, may we draw closer to God. Amen.

### Blessing prayer

**One:** When we feel alone and afraid,

**Two:** God promises to be there with us. (*Light a tealight and place beside salve.*)

**All:** We go out into the world, trusting in God's promise. Amen.

## Lent 5

### Gathering prayer

**One:** As we continue through the Season of Lent, we open our hearts to God. (*Light central candle.*)

**Two:** The colour red reminds us of God's steadfast love deep in our hearts. (*Place heart shape on red strip.*)

**All:** In this Lenten season, may we draw closer to God. Amen.

### Blessing prayer

**One:** God's way of love is written on our hearts.

**Two:** It beats with every pulse of our hearts. (*Light a tealight and place beside heart.*)

**All:** We go out into the world, trusting in God's promise. Amen.



# Praying the Psalms

**Praying the scriptures** is an ancient tradition called *lectio divina* (“holy reading”). By meditating on scripture we use our imaginations to step into the ancient words and listen for God’s voice speaking to us today. In this tradition we find a word or a phrase in a biblical text that speaks to us and carry this phrase with us for the rest of the day or week. When sitting on a bus or train, or facing a problem at school, or taking the dog for a walk we can reflect on these words or phrases. In this way they become our prayers and open our lives to be touched and transformed by Spirit of God.

**The Psalms are ancient prayers** which express a range of human emotions. The *Revised Common Lectionary* includes a reading from the Psalms for each week. During this Season of Lent take time to meditate each week on a reading from the Psalms. Prepare for “praying the psalms” by finding a quiet place; close your eyes, relax, and focus on your breathing; wait quietly in God’s presence; feel the Spirit flowing through you. As you pray the psalms become familiar with phrases and verses that can offer support and strength now and in the future.

## Week one

**Read** Psalm 25:1–10 silently; pause, and read it again aloud.

**Meditate** on verse 5: “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.”

**Wonder** Psalm 25 speaks of a special kind of waiting. What does it mean to “wait on God”?

**Pray** Share your insights about this psalm with God. Give thanks for God’s leading and teaching.

## Week two

**Read** Psalm 22:23–31 silently; pause, and read it again aloud.

**Meditate** on these phrases: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to God...” (v. 27a) and “...I shall live for God” (v. 29b).

**Wonder** Psalm 22 speaks of commitment to God’s way. What does it mean to “live for God”?

**Pray** Share your insights about this psalm with God. Give thanks for God’s leading and teaching.

## Week three

**Read** Psalm 19 silently; pause, and read it again aloud.

**Meditate** on these phrases: “...the commandment of God is clear, enlightening the eyes” (v. 7b) and “...let the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, my rock and my redeemer” (v. 14b).

**Wonder** For the writer of Psalm 19 God’s teachings are as life-giving as the sun and its light, giving guidance and support. How have you been “enlightened” by God’s teachings?

**Pray** Share your insights about this psalm with God. Give thanks for God’s leading and teaching.

## Week four

**Read** Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22 silently; pause, and read it again aloud.

**Meditate** on this phrase: “God’s steadfast love endures forever” (v. 1b).

**Wonder** The psalmist declares that God will rescue those in distress. When have you experienced God’s steadfast love and care during a time of distress?

**Pray** Share your insights about this psalm with God. Give thanks for God’s leading and teaching.

## Week five

**Read** Psalm 119:9–16 silently; pause, and read it again aloud.

**Meditate** on these phrases: “With my whole heart I seek you” (v. 10a); “I treasure your word in my heart...” (v. 11a); “I will study your teachings and follow your footsteps” (v. 15).

**Wonder** The psalmist speaks of a longing to know God deeply. When have you longed for God with your whole heart?

**Pray** Share your insights about this psalm with God. Give thanks for God’s leading and teaching.



# Projects

## Interfaith connections

(March 4 session)

Christian, Muslim, and Jewish believers are often described as “people of the book” because divinely inspired writings (Bible, Koran, and Torah) are central to each faith. Christians and Jews share sacred writings: the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures are part of the Torah. Here are some ideas for encouraging respect and understanding among the faith descendants of Abraham:

- **Learn** about Islam or Judaism by visiting a library or exploring the Internet.
- **Visit** a mosque and/or synagogue, and attend a worship service, if possible.
- **Connect** with Muslim or Jewish youth organizations in your area; meet for coffee and share prayers, quotations, and song lyrics that express something of each faith.
- **Join** an international interfaith movement or begin an interfaith group in your own community.

**For more information go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on Links; Lent, Easter 2012; March 4; Ages 15–18.**

## Project Linus

(March 18 session)

*Project Linus* (named after Linus, the little character in the Peanuts® comic strip who always carried a security blanket) began in 1995 in the United States when a woman wanted to provide “comfort blankets” for children going through chemotherapy. Now there are chapters in Canada, Australia, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, and other places. Most of the blankets are made by adult volunteers but there is a chapter in a high school in Ontario, formed in 2009. In their first two years they distributed 200 hand-made blankets to children who are ill or in crisis. The group of students meets regularly to sew blankets, from baby to teen sizes and in a variety of styles. The students deliver their blankets to different groups. It’s all done anonymously - the “blanketeers” don’t know who will receive a blanket and the recipients don’t know who has made them. One of the students, after delivering some blankets said: “Seeing their faces, them thinking, ‘Hey, these kids made these and they’re doing it for strangers.’ That’s pretty cool.”

**For more information and some patterns go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on Links; Lent, Easter 2012; March 18; Ages 15–18.**

## Footballs for peace

(April 22 session)

*Play31* was initiated when the founder, Jakob Lund, was working in Sierra Leone and came upon a couple of children who were playing with a completely ruined football (soccer ball). They were so excited to be given a new ball that Lund decided to do some fundraising to buy balls for other communities. The name *Play31* comes from Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which says that every child has the right to play. This project has used the power of football (soccer) games to bring together people whose countries and neighbourhoods have been torn apart by armed conflict. By donating footballs and facilitating community gatherings, this project helps to bring people together, to spread joy, and to help people to heal. It has been called “football for peace” or “football for reconciliation.” *Play 31* believes that football (soccer) can have an important place in local peace-building efforts.

**For more information and to view some videos about the project go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on Links; Lent, Easter 2012; April 15; Ages 15–18.**



# The Easter Season

## Gathering prayer

**Reader:** O God, we give thanks for this season of Easter.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

**All:** Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

**Reader:** May we witness to new life in Christ.  
(*Light the central Christ candle.*)

**All:** Alleluia!

**Reader:** May the light of this season shine in our lives and in the world.

(*Light one or more tealights, adding one each week.*)

**All:** Be with us God, in this time and through the coming days. Amen.

## Blessing prayer

**One:** May our faith be strengthened during this Easter season.

**Two:** May we have the courage of Mary Magdalene.

**One:** May we have the honesty of Thomas.

**Two:** May we follow the pathways of truth and justice.

**One:** May we truly listen to one another.

**Two:** May we be inspired to change the world with love.

**All:** Amen.

## Prepare a worship space...

1. Cover a small table with a gold, yellow, or white cloth (according to your tradition).
2. Place a white pillar candle in the middle.
3. Create a spiral shape leading out from the central candle by sprinkling a pathway of gold confetti or sequins.
4. Place six tealights at intervals along the spiral, with the last one at the end.
5. Place the poster *Consuming Fire* at the end of the spiral of tealights.
6. Each week the central candle will be lit first and a taper will then be used to light additional tealights, until all are lit by the seventh Sunday of Easter (May 20). These tealights will symbolize the growing light as the good news about the risen Christ spread out among the disciples and into the community.

## Love and Fear

There are only two feelings.

Love and fear.

There are only two languages.

Love and fear.

There are only two activities.

Love and fear.

There are only two motives,  
two procedures, two frameworks,  
two results.

Love and fear.

Love and fear.

Michael Leunig, taken from *A Common Prayer* (1990).  
Collins Dove, Victoria. Reprinted with permission by  
HarperCollins Publishers Australia.



# About the Art for this Lent and Easter

By Susan McIlveen

Find a well-lit place where you can arrange all of the art posters in front of you. Take in the range of colours and moods represented in the group as a whole. Now, consider each work in turn.

## **Person at the Window**

(Salvador Dali, 1925; oil on canvas, 103 x 75 cm/40.5 x 29.5 in)

Like the figure standing at the window, as viewers we are standing within a room looking out. We see something of what she sees through the window – water, sky, the land across the bay. We also see things she doesn't – reflections of water, land, and light in the window glass to her right; the person herself. In a similar way, as we look toward the Lenten journey that lies ahead, we see some things directly: practical choices we will make, spiritual disciplines we may embrace. But some things we can only see indirectly from here and must experience on the journey. What reflections linger in your mind from past Lenten journeys?

## **Rainbow over Pilbara**

(Sydney Nolan, 1982; enamel spray on canvas; 121 x 152 cm/47.5 x 60 in)

This image invites touch. Take your finger and follow the lines Nolan has made: the jagged grassland in the foreground, the ridged mountains behind, the rainbow arching across the whole. The original of this image is a larger work. Take your whole arm and re-create the sweeping gesture the artist used to spray the rainbow across the canvas. In the biblical story of Noah, a rainbow is a sign of God's promise to all creatures. What gestures and signs of promise do you imagine lie ahead of you on the Lenten journey? How is the Season of Lent itself a movement or gesture of promise?

## **Crucifix**

(Mexican, 17th century; polychrome wood) (*Not in ages 3–5 or 6–8*)

The cross is where Jesus' journey to Jerusalem ended. Little is known about the origins of this carving. Is it a representation of the cross on which Jesus was crucified, in which the wood is weeping with guilt for its role or with compassion for Jesus' suffering? Or is it a portrait of Jesus the Christ in which he is so deeply identified with his sacrificial death that his very body has become a wooden cross? Either way, this stark representation points us to equally stark truths: profound grief and profound love.

## **Cap Stump**

(Zach Pine, 3 February 2003; eucalyptus stump and flower caps)

For Zach Pine, art is a matter of noticing. Pine creates environmental art – sculptures made of natural objects,

arranged outdoors, and designed to be changed or even discarded by the elements. This piece, for example, was expected to last less than a day as the wind blew the flower caps away. Pine saw beauty in the decaying stump. By arranging flower caps in rays outward from its empty centre, Pine draws our attention beyond the present reality. New life is here as well, within the stump as it changes. New life is within and around us, too. The Season of Easter encourages us to watch for signs of death and resurrection in ourselves, our relationships, and our world.

## **Old Woman in Prayer**

(Prayer without End) (Nicolaes Maes, c. 1656; oil on canvas; 134 x 113 cm/52.75 x 44.5 in)

This painting contrasts earthly sustenance with spiritual nourishment. Imagine a line drawn diagonally across the image from the upper left to the lower right corners. A meal of fish and breads, a table and chair lie lower on the shadowed left side of the painting. Notice the greedy cat, seizing its moment. On the right, higher in the frame, the picture is filled with natural light. Here we find the face of a person deep in prayer, an open Bible, and the keys to life. Regardless of the distractions of the cat, the coming meal, and her responsibilities beyond this small circle of light, she is suspended in a moment with God. How might the first disciples have coped in the period between Jesus' death and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost? How might we balance Jesus' earthly absence and spiritual presence for ourselves?

## **Consuming Fire**

(Vanessa Hollifield, 2006; stained glass mosaic; 33 cm/13 in diameter)

Compare this image with *Cap Stump*. The circle with lines radiating outward, and the contrasting inner circle are the same, but so much is different. Where the core of *Cap Stump* was dark and hollow, here the centre is filled with light. The fire of colour and light outshines the darkness between the individual pieces of glass. Of what else does this image remind you? A mandala for meditation? The top of a Celtic cross? The flame of a single candle in a pitch-dark room? There is lots of movement here, as the individual pieces of glass dance within the circle. How did the Spirit move the first disciples at Pentecost? How will it continue to move your church in surprising new ways this year?

In worship, outreach, or learning, let these images provide a visual counterpoint to the words and music of the seasons from Lent through to Pentecost.

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# ENCYCLOPEDIAS, SUNSETS,<sup>AND</sup><sub>THE</sub> MYSTERIES OF GOD

What are we supposed to be doing, those of us who lead youth groups? We are sometimes called leaders, sometimes teachers, and sometimes facilitators. What are we really about? The way some tell it you might think that we are like encyclopedia salespeople. We have a product that we believe is important for everyone to have. The people on whose doors we knock have yet to understand the benefits of owning a fine set of encyclopedias. Not only do we feel that they need it but they also need to be persuaded that they need it. For many, encyclopedias are hardly essential, especially in this computer world of Internet and databases. So we need to convince people of the merits of having this set of books, of how it will change their lives, and offer them new horizons. All that they will need to know, we urge them, is contained within our leather-bound volumes. And we ourselves need to know a fair bit of what those volumes contain to demonstrate the benefits of all this knowledge. At the same time, though encyclopedias are an expensive investment, we also need to make our product seem affordable.

Now you can see the problem with this way of understanding our role as group leaders: it relies on us, our abilities, the information that we have, our selling techniques, how well we present ourselves. In the end it is all down to us.

When you read the Scriptures though, a different view emerges. The emphasis is not on us and on what we say and how we say it. The emphasis is on God and how God communicates love through the Spirit. Grab a concordance and look up the word "Spirit." Notice how many times it is the Spirit who takes the initiative in communicating love, grace, and faith. One of the best pieces of advice I ever had about working with young people came from an old man who, when I met him years ago, had been working with young people since before the Second World War. He told me, "Your job is to introduce young people to Jesus and then get out of the way." We need to remember that the Bible is pretty clear that it is God's Spirit who

draws us to God and it is God's Spirit who teaches us to be followers of Jesus.

What then is our role? Here's one way to look at it. Imagine that you are a National Park Ranger in the Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory of Australia. Each afternoon you take a flat-bottomed boat filled with tourists through some of the most beautiful tropical wetlands on earth. What is your job? It is certainly not to try and "sell" the beauties of Kakadu to your guests. Nothing you could say could ever match the glories they see with their own eyes. In fact, if you are a good and wise guide you spend much of your time silent. You know where to head the boat in order to capture a view of the sunset that will take your guests' breath taken away. Occasionally you speak, pointing out where the tiny wild orchids are hidden or a glimpse of a rare frog or bird. Perhaps you answer a question or two. And every day there will be questions that you cannot answer and deeper rhythms to understand. As much as the youngest and least experienced of your guests, you too are a learner on the edge of wonder.

So this then is our role as leaders. It is not for us to convince, to persuade, to sell. It is enough for us to be present, to share in the mysterious love of God, and to offer that invitation to all in our groups. We study and prepare, not because we are "the leader" but because we too are hungry learners waiting to witness God at work in our group and ourselves. It is God who will speak deep into the hearts of all. It is for us to be holy guides in the world of God.

Paul Turley

