



Seasons ^{OF} _{THE} Spirit™

Seasons ENCORE

Ages 6-8

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 6–8

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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.

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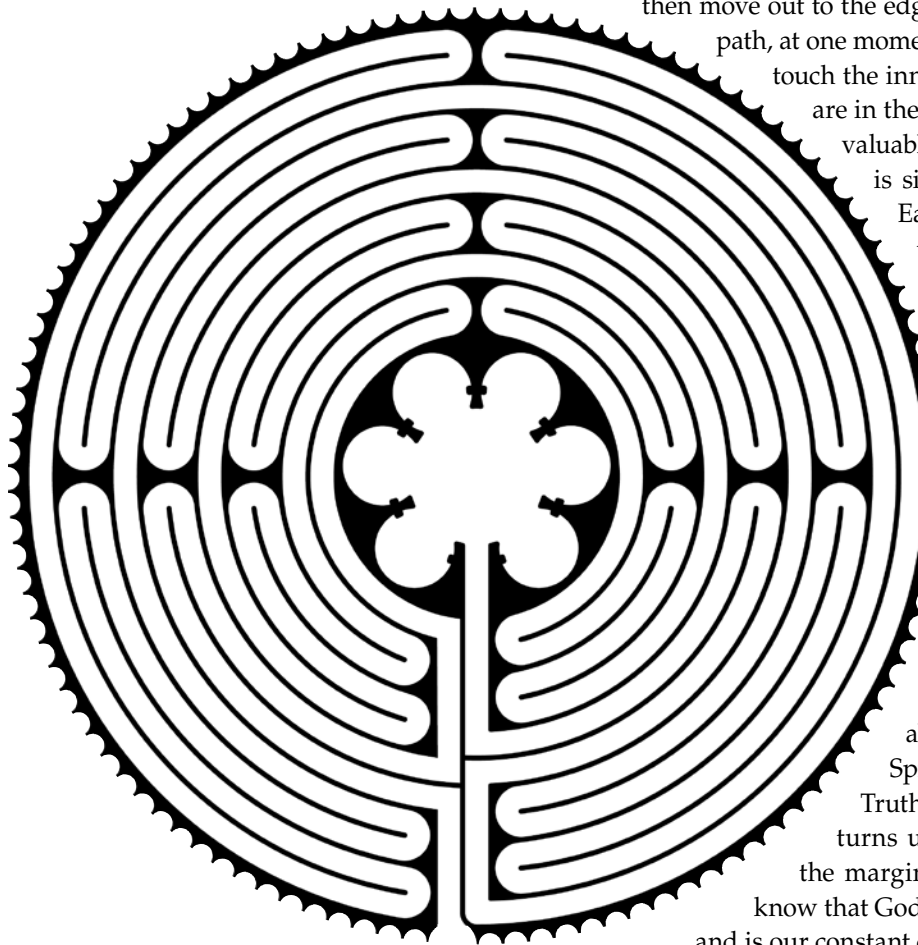
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About this Lent and Easter



The 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 6–8

In this Season of Lent children will hear some foundational stories of God’s promises from the Hebrew Scriptures. The colour purple is the symbolic colour for this season, but there will also be rituals based on the colours of the rainbow. Children will be invited to walk down a rainbow path of stepping stones to enter the worship space each week and bookmarks in different rainbow colours will help mark the progress through the Bible stories. Review the resource sheet “Lenten Rituals” on p. 88 for information on the rituals and the song which will be sung each week.

In this Season of Easter children will hear stories from the New Testament of Jesus’ appearances to the disciples after the Resurrection and the ways in which Jesus’ friends and followers shared the good news of God’s love. Yellow or gold is the colour of this time of celebration and children will be invited to decorate an Easter tree with butterflies as symbols of new life. Review the resource sheet “Easter Resources” on p. 90 for information on preparing the tree and for the song which will be sung each week.

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.

Storytelling At the heart of each session is the Bible story, retold in a way that will help this age group engage with the themes. As you prepare for leadership each week, read the focus scripture passage in your Bible, then review the version offered on the resource sheet. Story figures to use in many of these stories are included on the *Story Characters* poster.

Articles and extra resource sheets Some of the weekly sessions refer to materials on the extra resource sheets at the end of the package. There are also several articles offering background and resources for your leadership.

Art posters included with this resource offer opportunities for children to engage with fine art. Exploring this art together can reveal new insights for the whole group. Background information is provided in the article “About the Art for this Lent, Easter” (p. 95). The *Seasons of the Church Year* poster is a laminated colour teaching poster which can help children understand the flow and colours of the church year. It is available for separate purchase from the *Seasons* website.

Music referred to in the sessions can be found on the resource sheet “Seasonal Resources” (p. 89) and in the following resources available for separate purchase: the *Lent-Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, Volume 7 of the *Seasons Songbook* and *Music CD*, and *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* (from the *Seasons* website).

Website (www.seasonsonline.ca) offers information about the curriculum resources, an **Ask the Rabbi** section in the **Action Zone**, and connections between weekly focus passages and current events or films in the **Spirit Sightings** section.

Basic supply kit Stock a container with clear tape, masking tape, scissors (children and adult sizes), 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 to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 6–8



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).

Most children in this age group have had the experience of seeing a rainbow in the sky after a storm. This image is a favourite for including in their paintings and other artistic creations. They probably know that rainbows are created from a combination of sun shining through rain. This week's session offers the opportunity to hear that in the biblical story, the rainbow is the sign of a major promise. Some children in your group will be familiar with the story of Noah and the ark, while it may be a new one to others. As this week's focus passage comes from the end of this long story, there is an interactive summary provided on the resource sheet "God Sends a Rainbow" to help recall the story and set the scene. You can invite those who are familiar with the story

to add more details. Be aware that for some in the group this may be a frightening story if they have experienced or seen the effects of hurricanes or floods.

As six- to eight-year-olds are concrete thinkers, they may very well want to know if this is a "true" story. You can explain that many cultures around the world have similar stories in their heritage and that for us the story is a symbol of God's promise to love and care for all people. It was a symbol of starting over and having hope in a new life and a new relationship with God. As this is the beginning of a new season of the church year, spend time during this session introducing the new rituals. Pray for the children as they enter into the Season of Lent and learn more about God's promise in the rainbow.

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 6–8" (p. 2).
- Set a worship space with purple cloth, purple candle, matches, offering basket, Bible with a purple bookmark placed in this week's focus passage from Genesis.
- Bring basic supply kit (p. 2), and, if possible, *Lent–Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, *Seasons Songbook*, volume 7, *Seasons Music CD*, volume 7, and CD player.

Gather

- Bring resource sheet "Lenten Rituals" (p. 88); prepare a stepping stone pathway with rainbow-coloured circles (see information on resource sheet).
- Bring song "God Is With Us" (on resource sheet "Seasonal Resources," p. 89).

Engage

- Bring this week's resource sheet "God Sends a Rainbow" and the figure of Noah and family from the poster *Story Characters*.
- Bring poster *Rainbow over Pilbara*.

Respond

Choose one or more of the suggested activities. Prepare and bring materials.

- Rainbow snack:** sugar cookies/biscuits, tubes of coloured icing (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple), coloured sprinkles
- Rainbow activities:** review this week's resource sheet "Rainbow Activities," choose one or two activities and bring supplies.
- Rainbow mural:** mural paper, tempera paint (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) in shallow bowls, paint smocks

Bless

- Bring "Blessing Song" (on resource sheet "Seasonal Resources," p. 89).



Blessed Connections

Scripture

Genesis 9:8–17

FOCUS To learn about God's promise in the rainbow.

Gather

Welcome the children and explain that this week we begin a new season of the church year. Point out the purple cloth which is the colour we use for the Season of Lent. Explain that Lent is a time to wonder about God's way and to learn about God's promises.

Opening ritual

Rainbow path Teach the "Rainbow Steps Song" (p. 88) and invite children to sing this song as they follow the rainbow-coloured stepping stones to the worship area. Invite a child to light the candle.

Pray the "Lent 1" prayer (p. 88), inviting the children to repeat the last line all together.

Sing the song "God Is With Us" (on p. 89).

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting life and theme

Invite children to offer definitions of the word "promise."

■ **What kinds of promises have other people made to you?**

■ **What kinds of promises have you made to other people?**

■ **What does it mean to keep a promise?**

Suggest that they listen for the promise in today's Bible story, and who makes that promise.

Engage

Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Genesis. Explain that today's story comes from the first book in the Bible, Genesis, which means beginning. Use the resource sheet "God Sends a Rainbow" to tell the story based on **Genesis 9:8–17**, encouraging children to participate in making sounds during the introductory information.

After the story

Invite those who are familiar with this week's story of the flood to share other details that they remember. Follow up with some discussion using questions such as the following:

■ **What was God's promise to Noah and his family?**

■ **Why do you think people needed a reminder about this promise?**

Art engagement Look together at the poster *Rainbow over Pilbara*. Use some or all of the following questions to explore this image: Where do you see warm colours in this painting? Where do you see cooler colours? What do you notice about the rainbow? How does painting make you feel? Where would you like to be standing in this picture? Why?

Invite children to share their own stories of seeing rainbows.

■ **How do you feel when you see a rainbow?**

The rainbow is a reminder that God promises to love us and always take care of the earth and all living things.

■ **What can we do to show that we remember God's promise?**

Respond

Choose from the following activities:

- ❑ **Rainbow snack** To celebrate the promise God gave in the rainbow invite children to prepare a treat to share with others. Help children to decorate the cookies/biscuits with icing rainbows and coloured sprinkles. Share snack with another group or during the fellowship time after the worship service, telling others of the rainbow as a sign of God's love and care for all creation.
- ❑ **Rainbow activities** The rainbow is a sign to us of God's promise to care for the earth. Distribute supplies for chosen activity (activities) and follow the instructions on the resource sheet "Rainbow Activities" to help children make their own rainbow reminders of God's promise. If time permits they might make extras to share with others.



- ❑ **Rainbow mural** Shaking hands can be a way of making a promise with another. On a piece of mural paper, draw a single line to represent the lower edge of a rainbow arch. Invite children to dip their hands in the paint and make a handprint rainbow, using this line as a guide. Begin with purple until the whole line is covered. Then wash hands and use blue paint to make a second handprint arch; continue with green, yellow, orange, and red, allowing each row of handprints to slightly overlap the previous row to create a blending of the colours. Together decide on a title for the poster, such as "A promise from God," and display the poster in the church hall.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to light the candle.

Pray (*inviting children to repeat each line after you*)

Thank you, God, for your promise
to care for us and the whole world.

Help us to live in your way,
throughout Lent and every day. Amen.

Sing the "Blessing Song" (p. 89).

Send each child out with the words, "*(Child's name)*, God loves you. Let your life shine, like a beautiful rainbow."

Reflect

Some children may have had experiences of broken promises. In what ways did this session offer all children the assurance of God's constant love and care?



God Sends a Rainbow

(based on Genesis 9:8–17)

Story Tip

Children enjoy participating in storytelling. Invite them to make all the sounds as you set the scene for the story.

Setting scene

In the book of Genesis there's an amazing story about a man called Noah.

God told Noah to build a great big ark and fill it with animals (*animal sounds*).

Then it started to rain and rain and rain (*progressive "rain" sounds—tapping fingers, swishing hands, slapping legs*).

After forty days and forty nights Noah opened a porthole and looked around (*squeaky sound*).

Then the rain stopped, and the sun shone, and the winds blew and the water started to dry up (*blowing sounds*).

The story

Everyone was so glad when the rain stopped and the flood was over. Noah's grandchildren climbed out of the smelly ark and rolled around on the new grass. It was such fun. "Well," sighed old Noah, "that was quite an adventure. I'm glad it's over."

It wasn't over. The best part of the adventure was still to come.

"I am going to make a covenant with you," said God. "This covenant will be with you and your children, and your children's children, and your children's children's children. Forever.

"My covenant is not just with you. It's with all those animals and birds you had in the ark. In fact, it's with every living thing. My covenant is with the whole world."

The Noah family must have been looking puzzled. They didn't really know what a "covenant" was.

So God told them.

"This covenant means that I promise not to send any more floods to cover the whole world... That's my part of the covenant. Here's your part. I am giving everything to you, the people of the world. I am giving you the birds that fly in the air, the animals that walk on the ground, the fish that swim in the sea, the grass and the flowers and the trees. Everything. It's yours. Please take good care of it.

"And be good to each other. Take care of each other... And I have a special surprise to help you remember my covenant. Look!"

Then the whole world seemed to smile a funny, upside-down kind of smile. It seemed as if everything was painted in colour. The Noah family and all the animals and birds just stopped and looked and said, "Ohhhhhh!"

...It was a rainbow. A glorious rainbow in all the colours of the world.

"This rainbow is the sign of my covenant," said God. "Years and years from now, when people see my rainbow, they will remember my covenant with all the people of the world and with every living thing.

"As long as there is a world,
summer and winter,
seed time and harvest,
when it's cold and when it's hot,
day and night,
whenever the sun shines through the rain,
they will remember my promise.

I will be their God.

Always! Forever!"

From *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year B*, by Ralph Milton.
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Rainbow Activities

Rainbow bracelet

Materials needed: elastic thread, coloured beads

Instructions

1. String beads onto a length of elastic in the following order: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple.
2. Measure around the wrist, tie the ends of the elastic in a secure knot and snip the loose ends.
3. Wear as a reminder of God's rainbow promise.

Rainbow posters

Materials needed: white or black poster board, cut in half (one piece per child); red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple tissue paper

Preparation

1. Cut each piece of poster board in half.
2. Draw an outline of a rainbow shape with six arches on each piece of poster board.
3. Cut tissue paper into small squares and place each colour in an open container.

Instructions

1. Create a rainbow by covering each arch with glue and adding overlapping layers of tissue paper.
2. Begin with purple on the bottom and end with red on the top.
3. Display the poster as a reminder of God's rainbow promise.

Rainbow curtain

Materials needed: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple streamers; string

Instructions

1. Cut lengths of streamers a bit longer than the height of a doorway.
2. Tie or tape one end of each streamer to a length of string to create a curtain.
3. Use two or three sets of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple streamers for each curtain.
4. Attach to doorways in the church or at home, to remind all who pass through the doorways that they are surrounded by God's love.

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.

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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 to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 6–8



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).

Children in this age group often like to hear the stories of how their names were chosen and what they mean. They are beginning to know the importance of surnames and extended family groupings. Some children are quite particular about their names, and whether or not it is acceptable to shorten their name or use nicknames. Sometimes a child's nickname helps them remember a special relationship with a friend or relative. Occasionally children choose a name by which they want to be known.

Successful leaders know how important it is to learn the names of people in a group as

soon as possible. Knowing the names of the children in your group enables you to affirm their identities and enter into a more meaningful relationship. In today's story, children will hear how God gives Sarai and Abram a promise and, as a sign of a new relationship, gives them new names. Their new names would be a way of remembering that God was always with them. The children in your group might be able to relate to this phenomenon of special names which signify certain times of people's lives. Pray that the children will experience an affirmation of God's love and desire to be in relationship.

Prepare

Before the session

- Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16, and biblical background material (p. 9).
- Review "About this Lent and Easter" (p. 1) and "This Lent, Easter for Ages 6–8" (p. 2).
- Set a worship space with purple cloth, purple candle, matches, offering basket, Bible with a purple bookmark from last week's focus passage from Genesis, and a blue bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- Bring basic supply kit (p. 2), and, if possible, *Lent–Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, *Seasons Songbook*, volume 7, *Seasons Music CD*, volume 7, and CD player.

Gather

- Bring resource sheet "Lenten Rituals" (p. 88); prepare a stepping stone pathway with rainbow-coloured circles (see information on resource sheet) if not in place from last week.
- Bring song "God Is With Us" (on resource sheet "Seasonal Resources," p. 89).
- Bring baby name book, if possible.

Engage

- Bring this week's resource sheet "A Baby Called Laughter" and the figures of Abram and Sarai from the poster *Story Characters*.
- Print the words, Isaac, Sarai, Sarah, Abram, and Abraham on folded pieces of card stock.
- Bring poster *Old Woman in Prayer*.

Respond

Choose one or more of the suggested activities. Prepare and bring materials.

- Acrostic:** copies of this week's resource sheet "Promise Acrostic"
- Name letters:** self-adhesive stars, clear adhesive covering; cut a large letter from mural paper for each child (the first letter of their names)
- Star jars:** small jars with lids (such as baby food jars), star confetti, distilled water, glycerine, waterproof adhesive, spoons

Bless

- Bring a large glow-in-the-dark star for each child.
- Bring the "Blessing Song" (on resource sheet "Seasonal Resources," p. 89).



Living Legacy

Scripture

Genesis 17:1–7,
15–16

FOCUS To hear God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah and to all people.

Gather

Welcome the children to the second Sunday in Lent. Point out the purple cloth which is the colour we use for the Season of Lent. Explain that Lent is a time to wonder about God’s way and to learn about God’s promises.

Opening ritual

Rainbow path Review the “Rainbow Steps Song” (p. 88) and invite children to sing this song as they follow the rainbow-coloured stepping stones to the worship area. Invite a child to light the candle.

Pray the “Lent 2” prayer (p. 88), inviting the children to repeat the last line all together.

Sing the song “God Is With Us” (p. 89).

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting life and theme

Invite children to share stories of how their names were chosen and what their names mean. If possible, look up the meanings of names in a baby name book. Explain that in the ancient world a great deal of importance was placed on giving names and on the meanings of the names. The Hebrew people often gave their children names which described something special about them. When children became adults their names might be changed to reflect that change. Today that sometimes happens too, for example, a child called “Kathy” might change their name to “Kathryn” when they are older.

Names play an important part in the Bible story today.

Engage

Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the blue bookmark to open it to the book of Genesis. Explain that today’s story comes from the first book in the Bible, Genesis, which means beginning. Open to the purple bookmark from last week marking last week’s reading and recall the story of Noah and the flood. Then return to the blue bookmark for this week’s focus passage. Use the resource sheet “A Baby Called Laughter” to tell the story based on **Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16**, inviting children to choose and arrange the name cards around the figures of Abram and Sarai as they hear each name in the story.

After the story

Art engagement Look together at the poster *Old Woman in Prayer*. Does the woman look happy or sad? Invite children to imagine that this woman is Sarai, praying and telling God about how much she and Abram would like to have a baby.

■ What promise did God give to Abram and Sarai?

Imagine how Sarah smiled when she finally held baby Isaac. Invite children to imagine some things that Abraham and Sarah might do with their baby. Invite those who have younger siblings to talk about the things that their parents do for their young brother or sister. Remind the group that we are all children of God’s promise. God knows each of us by name and loves us.

■ If God were to give you a special new name what might it be?

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities:

- ❑ **Acrostic** Like Abraham and Sarah, we are people of God's promise. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Promise Acrostic" and invite children to think of words from this week's story which begin with each letter of the word "Promise" (such as "Sarai" for "S") and write them on their sheets. Have them create their own acrostic puzzles from other words in this week's story.
- ❑ **Name letters** Our names are an important part of who we are. Distribute to each child the papers with the first letter of their name. Have them decorate their letter with drawings and



self-adhesive stars. Invite older children to write some words describing themselves within the letter (such as dancer, blue eyes). Laminate the letters with clear adhesive covering and display these in the room.

- ❑ **Star jars** God promised Abraham and Sarah that their descendants would be as many as the stars. Distribute jars and help children fill half-full with water, add a few drops of glycerine, and spoon in some star confetti. Place water-proof adhesive around the edges of the lids and seal the lid onto the jars. Encourage children to shake their jars to see the stars swirl as reminders of God's love.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to light the candle. Give each child a glow-in-the-dark star as a reminder that they are children of God's promise.

Pray (*inviting children to repeat each line after you*)

Thank you, God, for your promise
to care for us and the whole world.
Help us to live in your way,
throughout Lent and every day. Amen.

Sing the "Blessing Song" (p. 89).

Send each child out with the words, "*(Child's name)*, God knows you by name and loves you. Go and share God's love."

Reflect

How do the children understand the meaning of God's promise? In what ways might you help them to grow in their relationship with God?



A Baby Called Laughter

(based on Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16)

Story Tip

Invite children to participate by taking turns finding the name cards and placing them in a row as each is mentioned in the story.

Many, many years before the time of Jesus, Sarai and Abram walked to many different places trying to find out where God wanted them to live.

God made a promise to Sarai and Abram. "You will have children, said God. "And your children will have children. And your children's children will have more children. The place where I want you to live will be the country that is full of your children."

Abram and Sarai believed God's promise. But nothing seemed to happen. "We are getting old," they said to God. "Abram is 99 years old. Next year he will be 100! Sarai is 90 years old. We are too old to have babies!"

"Listen!" said God. "All you have to do is live God's way. I am God. And I have made a promise to you. I will keep my promise.

"Abram!" said God. "You will be the father of whole countries full of people. So your name from now on is Abraham. The name Abraham means 'the father of many, many people. And Sarai!"

Sarai didn't say anything. She just listened.

"Sarai! You will now be called Sarah, which means 'princess'. You will be the mother of many, many people. Whole countries full of people."

When Sarah heard that, she began to giggle. When Abraham heard Sarah giggling, he couldn't stop himself. He laughed right out loud.

"I'm sorry, God," said Abraham, who could hardly talk because he was laughing so hard. "How can it be? Old people like us can't have babies. You must be joking, God."

"No, I'm not joking," said God. "I'm glad you are laughing. It is good to laugh at such wonderful surprises. Do you know what I want you to call the baby when it is born?"

Sarah and Abraham laughed even more. They wondered what God would call a baby that was born to people who were very old.

"Call your baby Isaac!" said God. "Isaac means 'laughter.' The tiny baby who will start this whole country full of people will be called Isaac – laughter. It's good to laugh about such wonderful things!"

Sarah and Abraham laughed some more. Then they said "Thank you!" to God for giving them such wonderful surprises.

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Promise Acrostic

Find words in today's story which begin with each of the following letters and write these words in the spaces beside each letter. Turn the page over and create your own acrostic from other words in today's Bible story.

P _____

R _____

O _____

M _____

I _____

S _____

E _____

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.

• • • • •

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 to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 6–8

Most children have a natural appreciation of the wonders of creation. Children in this age group can often become absorbed by their explorations in nature: watching a colourful bug crawl along a leaf, looking at a spider web, noticing a drop of rain hanging on a blade of grass, finding a beautifully patterned rock or shell. They often don't experience a separation between themselves and the rest of creation. School-aged children often instinctively sense the greatness of God and the wonders of creation and the universe.

In this week's focus passage the psalmist marvels at God's creation. Even if you live in an urban environment you can help children connect with nature by encouraging them

to notice even the smallest weed growing through a crack. You can help them appreciate the grandeur of God's creation by bringing some nature books and magazines to the group.

Although children in this age group are making the shift to abstract thinking, many are still primarily concrete thinkers. They may hear the phrase "God's law" in today's reading from the psalms as a set of rules, defining what is right and wrong. This session will help them explore the idea of law as God's loving and life-giving ways. Pray that the children may experience anew the wonder of God through creation and in one another.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Psalm 19, and biblical background material (p. 15).
- ❑ Set a worship space with purple cloth, purple candle, matches, offering basket, Bible with the purple and blue bookmarks in previous passages in Genesis, and a green bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- ❑ Bring basic supply kit (p. 2), and, if possible, *Lent–Easter 2012 Music Booklet*, *Seasons Songbook*, volume 7, *Seasons Music CD*, volume 7, and CD player.

Gather

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "Lenten Rituals" (p. 88); prepare a stepping stone pathway with rainbow-coloured circles (see information on resource sheet) if not in place from last week.
- ❑ Bring song "God Is With Us" (on resource sheet "Seasonal Resources," p. 89).
- ❑ Bring, in a small box, a variety of items from nature or magazine pictures of nature items.

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "A Beautiful World"; cut round circles from

yellow construction paper (one per child) and mount on wide craft sticks.

- ❑ Bring poem "As Far As I Can See" (on resource sheet "Seasonal Resources," p. 89).
- ❑ Bring posters *Rainbow over Pilbara* and *Cap Stump*; review information about these images in the article "About the Art for this Lent, Easter" (p. 95).

Respond

Choose one or more of the suggested activities. Prepare and bring materials.

- ❑ **Poster:** copies of this week's resource sheet "Loving Ways," sheet of poster board
- ❑ **Mobile:** plain paper plates (cut in half), self-adhesive stars, glitter, craft foam, yarn, cardboard templates of star, crescent moon, and sun shapes (see patterns in *Virtual Resource Booklet* in Library at www.seasonsonline.ca)
- ❑ **Planting seeds:** small plant pots, flower stickers, potting soil, bulbs or large seeds (beans or sunflowers), spoons

Bless

- ❑ Bring one large glow-in-the-dark star for each child.
- ❑ Bring the "Blessing Song" (on resource sheet "Seasonal Resources," p. 89).



Cosmic Law

Scripture

Psalm 19

FOCUS To wonder at the presence of God in creation and in one another.

Gather

Welcome the children to the third Sunday in Lent. Explain that Lent is a time to wonder about God's way and to learn about God's promises.

Opening ritual

Rainbow path Review the "Rainbow Steps Song" (p. 88) and invite children to sing this song as they follow the rainbow-coloured stepping stones to the worship area. Invite a child to light the candle.

Pray the "Lent 3" prayer (p. 88), inviting the children to repeat the last line all together.

Sing the song "God Is With Us" (on p. 89).

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting life and theme

Place the box of items from nature in the middle of the group and take turns lifting the items or pictures out and talking about the colours, textures, sizes and shapes. Invite children to talk about some of their favourite places to be outside in nature (for example, a tree fort in the back garden, a public playground, a forest, a lake).

■ **What are some of your favourite things in God's wonderful world?**

Engage

Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table. Show the purple and blue bookmarks marking the previous weeks' stories from the book of Genesis, and then use the green bookmark to open it to the book of Psalms. Explain that the Psalms are a collection of songs and poems about God. Distribute yellow circle "suns" for children to use in participating in this week's story. Use the resource sheet "A Beautiful World" to tell the story based on **Psalm 19**.

After the story

Art engagement Invite children to look at 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* and have children name all the different colours they see. Why might the artist have painted the ground red?

■ **If you were going to paint a picture of God's wonderful world what would you include? Why?**

Poem Invite children to repeat each line and action after you for the poem "As Far As I Can See" (p. 89). The psalmist reminds us that when we follow in God's ways we show God's care and love for everyone.

■ **What would the world look like if everyone in the world chose to follow God's loving ways?**

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities:

- ❑ **Poster** The psalmist stated that God's loving ways are sweeter than honey. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Loving Ways" and invite children to fill in the "honeycomb sections" with words or drawings depicting ways in which they have shared God's love. Have them cut these out and glue onto a sheet of poster board to create a display of loving ways.
- ❑ **Mobile** In Psalm 19 we read that the sky and everything in it tells us about God's glory. Invite children to make mobiles as reminders of God's glory in creation. Distribute paper plates and craft supplies. Help children cut suns, moons, and stars from the craft foam and glue



onto their plates. Help children print "The sky shows God's glory" on their plates and decorate with star stickers and glitter. Punch holes along the bottom edge and tie on foam shapes with yarn, and make a yarn hanger for the top.



- ❑ **Planting seeds** Creation is full of growing things. Invite children to plant seeds or bulbs as reminders of God's world. Have children decorate their plant pots with stickers, spoon in some potting soil, and plant seeds or bulbs to take home.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to light the candle.

Pray (*inviting children to repeat each line after you*)

Thank you, God, for your promise
to care for us and the whole world.
Help us to live in your way,
throughout Lent and every day. Amen.

Sing the "Blessing Song" (p. 89).

Send each child out with the words, "*(Child's name)*, God loves you. Go and follow in God's loving ways."

Reflect

In what ways do children celebrate the marvels of creation? How might you and the group continue to take opportunities to join with creation in praising God?



A Beautiful World

(based on Psalm 19)

Story Tip

Sometimes during a story the children can get distracted. If this happens, pause momentarily and make sure you have everyone's full attention before continuing.

(Practice saying the refrain [in bold] in response to a pre-arranged cue, such as raising your arm. Distribute sun shapes and invite the children to move them in a large arc as they say the words.)

Once there lived a songwriter who loved God and tried hard to follow in God's ways. One day our songwriter was drifting along in a boat, looking at the sky, and thinking about God's amazing creation. All day long the songwriter noticed the beauty of the sky, watching as the sun rose, travelled across the sky and then went down in a blaze of red and orange. As the sun went down, the first twinkling stars appeared in the night sky.

"Amazing!" thought the songwriter. "God made the sky and everything in it: the sun, the moon, the clouds, the rainbows, and all the stars. Isn't God amazing?" As the stars twinkled in the night sky, the songwriter thought about all the wonderful things that God had made and how wonderful it was to live in God's world. "I'll write a song about this," decided the songwriter.

The sky above has a message to share.
It tells us of God's love and care.
It does not speak, but it is heard.
It shares God's love without a word.

Children: From sunrise to sunset God's voice is heard around the world. *(Move sun shapes.)*

"The sun, the moon, and the stars all tell us of God's love," thought the songwriter. "They remind us that God is very, very close."

The sun that lights the sky each day reminds us of God's loving ways.

The moon and stars that shine so bright say, "God is with you day and night."

Children: From sunrise to sunset God's voice is heard around the world. *(Move sun shapes.)*

"It's not just the sky that tells us about God," exclaimed the songwriter. "God wants us to be safe and live in love and peace. God's ways tell us about God's love, too."

God's way shows us how we should go.
It's sweeter than the honeycomb.
God's way is sweet, God's way is true.
It helps us know what we should do.

Children: From sunrise to sunset God's voice is heard around the world. *(Move sun shapes.)*

"When we follow in God's ways, we show others God's love and care," thought the songwriter. "I'll finish my song with a prayer."

O God, may all I think and say
bring happiness to you today.



Loving Ways

God wants us to be safe and live in love and peace, so God told us how we should live. When we follow in God's ways we show others God's love and care. Together we can fill the world with the sweetness of God's love.

This week I showed
God's love by...

This week I showed
God's love by...

This week I showed
God's love by...

This week I showed
God's love by...

Way to go!
God's loving ways
are sweet.



LENT – EASTER 2012

Dear Family,

During Lent the children will be hearing stories from the Hebrew Scriptures (also known as the Old Testament). These stories are about promises from God and how God kept them. Children will hear about the promise to Noah and his family, the promise to Abraham and Sarah, and promises spoken in the Psalms and by the prophet Jeremiah. The colours of the rainbow will be included in the opening rituals for each week and children will walk a path of “rainbow stepping stones” to help them review the promises. Here is a song you could sing at home on each of the six Sundays during the Season of Lent.

Season of Lent

(tune: “Mary Had a Little Lamb”)

Now we are in the season of Lent,
season of Lent, season of Lent.

Now we are in the season of Lent,
we’re on our way to Easter.

Following Easter Sunday, on April 8, the Bible stories will be taken from the New Testament. Children will learn about Jesus’ appearances to the disciples after the Resurrection and the ways in which Jesus’ friends and followers shared the good news of God’s love. You might like to read to read these stories together at home: John 20:19–31, Luke

24:36b–48, John 10:11–18, Acts 8:26–40, John 15:9–17, and Acts 1:15–17, 21–26. Reading the Bible with your child suggests that these stories are important to you. Here is a song you could sing together during the 50-day Season of Easter.

Happy Easter to You

(tune: “Happy Birthday”)

Happy Easter to you,
Happy Easter to you,
Happy Easter everybody,
Happy Easter to you.

We celebrate Pentecost Sunday

on May 27, marking the end of the Season of Easter. This is a day to celebrate the Spirit of God and the growth of the Christian community. The following poem can help children understand this image.

God’s Spirit

We can’t see the wind
but we know it’s there,
‘cause it rustles the leaves
and blows through our hair.

God’s Spirit is with us,
we know this is true.
And people can see it
in the things that we do.

We will be praying for your child during these weeks. We ask that you and your child pray for us as well as we prepare for and lead the sessions each week. May this Lenten and Easter season be a time of spiritual nurture and growth for your child and your family.

Sincerely,



Lenten Rituals

Lenten rainbow pathway

The rainbow is a visual sign of God's covenant promise. Create a pathway of "stepping stones" using large circles cut from coloured construction paper: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Cut several circles of each colour to make the pathway connect from the doorway of your meeting space to the worship area. During Lent the children will sing the "Rainbow Steps" song as they follow this rainbow path of stepping stones to gather in the worship space during the opening ritual each week. There they will light a candle and say a prayer together. As there is a special all-ages gathering on the sixth Sunday of Lent (Palm/Passion Sunday) there are only five prayers included on this page.

Rainbow Steps song

(tune "Hokey Pokey")

We put our right feet down.
We put our left feet down.
We put our right feet down.
As we step ahead in faith.
We walk the rainbow pathway,
and we say a daily prayer.
That's what it's all about.

Lenten prayers

Lent 1

Leader Thank you, God,
for all the colours in our world.
Thank you for rainbows,
which are a sign of your love.

All: Thank you for your blessings, God.
Amen.

Lent 2

Leader Thank you, God,
that you know us each by name.
Thank you for the stars in the sky,
that remind us of your love.

All: Thank you for your blessings, God.
Amen.

Lent 3

Leader Thank you, God,
for all the wonderful things in creation.
Thank you for...*(invite children to name some things)*.
Help us to care for your creation.

All: Thank you for your blessings, God.
Amen.

Lent 4

Leader Thank you, God,
that you give us hope when times are hard.
Thank you for being with us
through every day.

All: Thank you for your blessings, God.
Amen.

Lent 5

Leader Thank you, God,
for your love that is deep in our hearts.
Thank you for your promise,
to love us always.

All: Thank you for your blessings, God.
Amen.



Seasonal Resources

God Is With Us

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**

Every day. **Every day.**

God will always love us. **God will always love us.**

Thank you God. **Thank you God.**

Blessing Song

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

May God bless you. **May God bless you.**

Keep you safe. **Keep you safe.**

May God's love surround you. **May**

God's love surround you.

Go in peace. **Go in peace.**

As Far As I Can See

As far as I can see, God is there.

(Shade eyes with hand and look around.)

As high as I can stretch, God is there.

(Stand on tiptoe and reach up.)

As low as I can go, God is there.

(Crouch down.)

God says, "Reach out in love."

(Spread arms wide.)

I will share some love with you.

(Shake hands and smiles with each other.)

Jesus Calls Us

(tune: "Jesus Loves Me")

Jesus calls us every day,
while we work and while we pray.

As we follow we will know.

that our love and kindness show.

Yes, Jesus calls us. Yes, Jesus calls us.

Yes, Jesus calls us, he calls us every
day.

Story Characters poster

The figures from this poster will be used as storytelling aids during Lent and Easter. Cut these out and mount on paper roll tubes or wide craft sticks so they will be available when you need them. Some of the figures are named and will be used in particular stories. Other figures are unnamed and are intended to be chosen by the children to represent story characters as needed. Help the children to understand that no one really knows what the people in the Bible stories looked like. Artists use their imaginations to draw the figures and we can use our imaginations too as we choose the figures to represent the characters in each story.



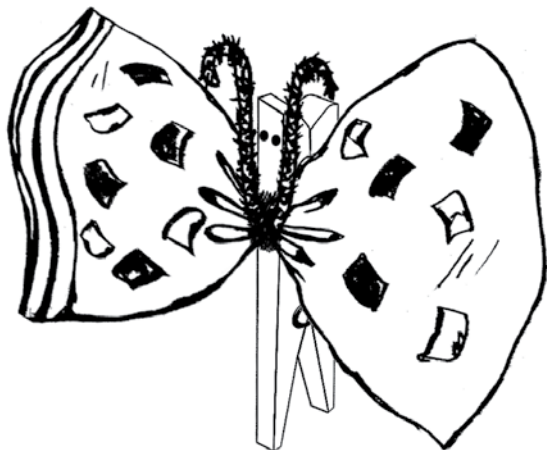
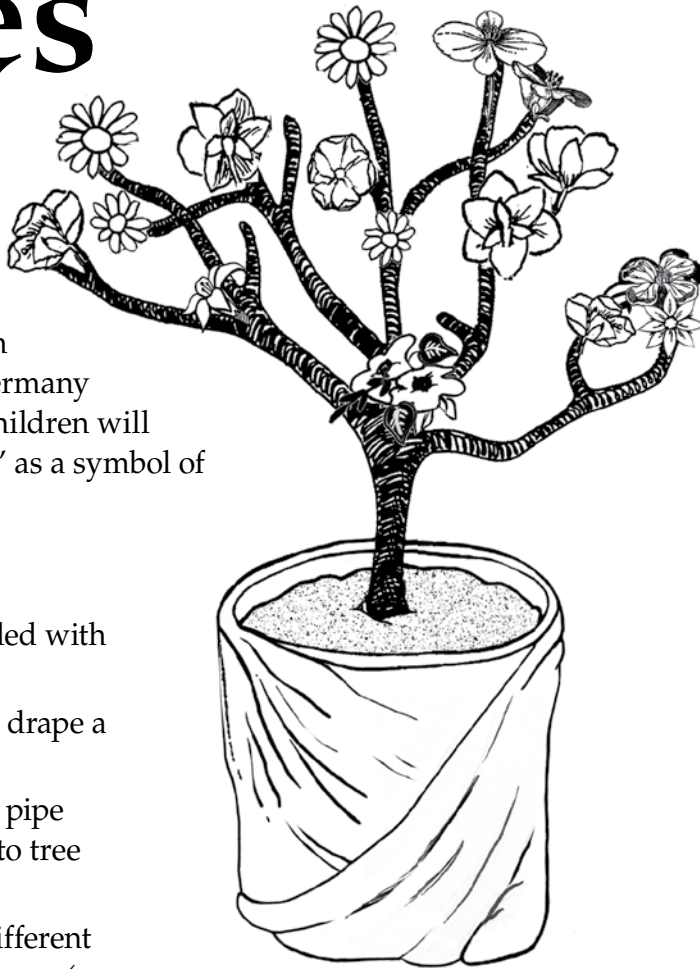
Easter Resources

Easter tree

Decorating a bare branch or leafless tree with eggs at Easter has been a long tradition in Germany and the Ukraine. During the Easter season children will add a butterfly each week to the “Easter tree” as a symbol of Jesus’ resurrection.

Preparation

1. Place a bare tree branch in a container filled with soil or sand.
2. Place the “tree” in the worship space and drape a yellow cloth around the container.
3. Prepare several silk flowers by wrapping pipe cleaners around the stems (for attaching to tree branches).
4. Make seven butterflies with squares of different coloured tissue paper and black pipe cleaners (*see illustration*).
5. Each Sunday attach another butterfly to a branch, using a clothespin.



Easter Song

(tune: “This Old Man”)

Dance and sing!
Twirl and shout!
Alleluia, yell it out!
Sing a song of joy to God.
Jesus lives in a new way.



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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