

All Saints Day (Year A)

What is it like to live as God's saint? This week's readings affirm that all who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. God's saints today – including all who are baptized into Christ – are called to look ahead, to know the hope to which God calls. And God's saints are called to live now in the presence of God's promises, working toward their fulfillment.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

This passage begins the first of Jesus' five major sections of teaching in Matthew. Matthew 5 is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, which might be thought of as Jesus' vision of life in God's reign. The Sermon on the Mount concludes with Matthew 7:28. The setting is on a mountain, where Jesus is seated and teaching the disciples. Noting Matthew 7:28, however, one can imagine the crowds mentioned in verse 1 craning their necks to overhear Jesus' words.

In Matthew, the gospel writer sets up comparisons between Jesus and Moses. Moses encountered God on a mountain and received God's Law to give to the Hebrew people. In these verses, Jesus speaks from the mountain to teach about God's reign.

Verses 3–12 are called "The Beatitudes," pronouncements of blessings. What Jesus says about those who are blessed by God likely surprised and shocked those who heard it. Jesus teaches that God's blessings come to those who are ignored by society, those who are viewed as outcasts, and those who are willing to work for what God values. Verses 3–6 speak of the relationship between believers and God; verses 7–12 speak of the relationship between believers and the world.

Jesus teaches that poverty of spirit, meekness, longing for God's righteousness, showing mercy, relying on God, and working for peace may come into the lives of believers. Jesus speaks a word of promise into such situations: the favour of God's reign means comfort, inheritance, fulfillment, mercy, and eternal relationship with God. The Beatitudes close with Jesus' encouragement to his followers to rejoice. Others may verbally or physically abuse and persecute them for living lives of faithful service to God and neighbour, but God has the ultimate power.

Jesus' words call us and all the saints to gaze forward to the time when God's promises will be fulfilled. Those who weep now will laugh. Those who are hungry now will be filled. Those who are poor now will receive the riches of God's inheritance. With this future firmly in our gaze, the obstacles to faith become smaller, the path easier to navigate.

The writer of **1 John 3:1–3** proclaims that it is God's love that makes one a child of God, and calls on the readers of this letter – then and now – to claim this identity with hope and faith.

Written to encourage Christians facing persecution in the Roman Empire late in the first century CE, the book of Revelation is a vision of the ultimate fulfillment of God's reign. **Revelation 7:9–17** is the writer's vision of multitudes from every nation – including those who have suffered in their faith – coming to live in God's reign. God's gift of salvation to all peoples is received by God's people with endless, wondrous worship.

Psalm 34:1–10, 22 is part of a wisdom teaching about God's goodness. There is no direct address to God, rather the psalmist calls for all to "taste and see" that God is good. God delivers; God saves; God redeems the lives of God's faithful saints.

• • • • •

All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for the blessings God has given us to share with others. When we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. We have a role to play, along with the saints of old, in the story of God's saving work. What might we do, as individuals and as the church, to welcome all people to live in God's promise?



Focus Scripture
Matthew 5:1–12

Additional Scriptures
Revelation 7:9–17
Psalm 34:1–10, 22
1 John 3:1–3

Eternal God, you know our yesterdays, our todays, and our tomorrows. Thank you for working in the lives of all your saints. Give us faith to engage the world according to your ways, living in hope and confidence of your saving love. Amen.

Focus for Ages 3–5

The word “saint” may be new to many of the children in this age group and it may be a puzzling word for most of them. But it needn’t be that way. The playful conversation with Priscilla will help the children to hear the word in a new way, helping to make the idea of a saint accessible and real for the children – not out of reach and irrelevant. The focus passage for All Saints Day this year is the Beatitudes, from the gospel of Matthew. This teaching from Jesus can provide both leaders and children with guidance in understanding what saintliness looks like.

This session offers a version of the Beatitudes that will enable the children to understand what Jesus had in mind when Jesus thought of his followers as “partners in service.” The use of the feather and spoken response will set a reflective pace as the children listen to words which can be at the heart of their relationship with Jesus. The Respond activities offer practical and meaningful ways for the children to begin to act on the message in the Beatitudes. Pray that the children will continue to grow in their awareness of God’s blessing on them in all they do.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Gather materials for the worship area: *white cloth, white pillar candle, and Bible* with a bookmark placed in the gospel of Matthew.
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.
- ❑ Bring *candlesnuffer, matches, and CD player*, if possible.

Gather

- ❑ Bring *Priscilla, the puppet*, or another *hand puppet*.
- ❑ Bring *large soft ball*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring the *resource sheet “Blessed by God”* (p. 5) and a *soft feather*.
- ❑ Bring a *special party snack*.

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Sharing blessings:** *copies of the resource sheet “Blessing Moments”* (p. 6)
- ❑ **Mural:** *length of mural paper, felt markers, crayons*
- ❑ **Thank you cards:** *plain paper, variety of decorative and craft materials* (such as pieces of ribbon, lace, glitter, self-adhesive stickers, feathers), *glue sticks*; fold papers in half to make cards; on the outside of each card print, “Thank you,” and on the inside print, “You are a blessing to our church.”



All Saints Day (Year A)

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To know that God gives us gifts of love that we call blessings.

Gather

Welcome children individually by name. Sit together and encourage them to tell about what they have done during the week. Thank them for their storytelling and for listening to their friends' stories.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Invite a child to spread the white cloth on the table, and place the Bible and the candle on it. Mention that this is a very special day called All Saints Day. It is a day to remember all the people who love God and help us to follow Jesus.

Sing or listen to a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Pray Dear God,

thank you for bringing us together again
and helping us learn about you. Amen.

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

Priscilla, the puppet, introduces the theme

Priscilla: Good morning, Saint (*name each person by saying "saint" before his or her name*). I heard that this is All Saints Day and I thought it would be fun to call each of you a saint.

Leader: And good morning to you, Saint Priscilla.

Priscilla: Why do we have an All Saints Day?

Leader: This is a special day to celebrate and remember all the people who loved God and followed

Jesus. And anyone who knows and loves God is called a saint. Saints are all ages and live all around the world.

Priscilla: Hmm. I listen to stories of Jesus. I show Jesus' love. And I love God and try to do what God wants me to do. Then I really am a saint too? And all of you really are saints?

Leader: Yes, Priscilla. Let's think of some other saints that we know. (*Encourage children to name people they know who love God and show Jesus' love.*)

Leader: Imagine what it would be like if everyone who loved God and followed Jesus came together in one place!

Priscilla: Our church wouldn't be big enough to hold everyone!

Leader: You are right! There are so many, many people who have learned about God's love through Jesus. And so many, many people who show God's love to others. What a wonderful thing to remember! (*Place Priscilla nearby or say goodbye to her.*)

Game If not using Priscilla or another puppet, or after the puppet conversation, invite children to sit in a circle to play a game. Say, "Who shows Jesus' love?" and roll the ball to one child. That child says, "I do." Then everyone says, "Hi, Saint (*child's name*)."

That child repeats the question and rolls the ball to another child. Continue until every child has had a chance to roll and catch the ball. Then encourage children to name other people they know who show Jesus' love.

Engage

Invite children to sit in a circle. Ask a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and open it to today's story, marked with the bookmark. Place the open Bible in the middle of the circle and say, "It's story time – time to tell, to listen, and to remember together." Review the instructions at the top of the resource sheet "Blessed by God" and lead the children in the story based on **Matthew 5:1–12**.

After the story

Close Bible and return it to the worship table. Say, "Our stories help us to be part of God's story."

Sing "The Blessing Song" (on the resource sheet "Blessing Moments").

After you have sung the song several times, talk with the children about being a blessing. Say, "Jesus

wanted us to know that God gives us gifts of love that we call blessings. When we are kind and loving, we are a blessing to others." Encourage children to think of how they can be a blessing to others. Each time a way is suggested, invite the children to clap and say "B-L-E-S-S!" together.

Snack Invite children to celebrate all the saints that have helped them learn more about God's love. Say a prayer together and share a special party snack.

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

- ❑ **Sharing blessings** When we do loving things for others, we spread God's blessing. Hand out copies of the resource sheet "Blessing Moments." Talk about how each picture shows someone sharing God's blessings. Invite children to draw happy faces beside pictures of things they would like to do to be blessings to others. Sing "The Blessing Song."
- ❑ **Mural** Invite children to see themselves as a blessing by creating a group mural. Spread a long sheet of paper on the floor and have the children lie beside each other with their heads and shoulders on the paper. Trace the outlines of the children in this position and then encourage children to add their own facial fea-



tures and decorate their shapes as they choose. Add a title such as "We are all a blessing" and hang in a prominent place in the church as a reminder.

- ❑ **Thank you cards** Some people in the church community, such as those who fold bulletins or tidy the sanctuary are rarely thanked. Invite children to share the blessings they have received by giving these people a blessing. Distribute the prepared cards and read the sentences aloud. Encourage children to decorate the cards with the materials provided. Help them print their names on the inside of the cards. If possible, involve the children in the distribution of the cards.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and light the candle again. Invite children to join hands in a circle.

Sing or listen to a blessing song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Pray Dear, God,
you bless us with your love.
You show us how special we are.
Help us to do the same for others.
Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), God knows you and blesses you."

Reflect

In what ways did the children see themselves as receiving blessings or bringing blessings to

others? How are they a blessing in your life? How can you continue to be a blessing in their lives?



Story Tip

Using voice variations, facial expressions, a feather prop, and a repetitive phrase helps to draw young children into the story.

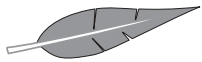
Blessed by God

(based on Matthew 5:1–12)

(Whenever the feather symbol is shown in the story, hold the feather high in the air and let it go. Encourage everyone to say, "God blesses you." When the feather lands on the floor, everyone says in an emphatic voice, "Yes!")

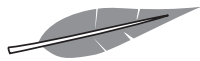
"Come, sit down, my friends. I have something important to say to you. I want you to be my disciples." Jesus looked around. Many of his friends were with him. This would be a good time to sit on the hillside and talk together. This would be a good time to tell his friends what it means to be a disciple.

"Friends, when you see someone hungry, know that God blesses them. God doesn't want anyone to be hungry. Share your food with others."



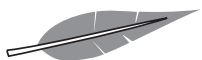
God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone sad, know that God blesses them. God wants to help their sadness go away. Please help others who are feeling sad."



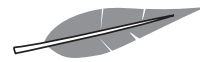
God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who wants to know more about God, know that God blesses them. God wants to help everyone know more about God's way. Be kind and loving, share your food and toys, and people will know what God is like."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who is kind to others, know that God blesses them. God wants kindness to come to them, too. Care about other people. God cares about you very much."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who is gentle and who doesn't hurt others, know that God blesses them. They will always be part of God's family. Tell others that God loves them."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who tells the truth and is honest with God, know that God blesses them. God loves them and will always be with them. Tell others that we can always trust God."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, you are all God's children. Listen to God. Listen to each other."



God blesses you...
Yes!

Jesus looked around at all his friends again. "You are my disciples," Jesus said. "I love you and I want you to be happy. You are a blessing to others when you live God's way."



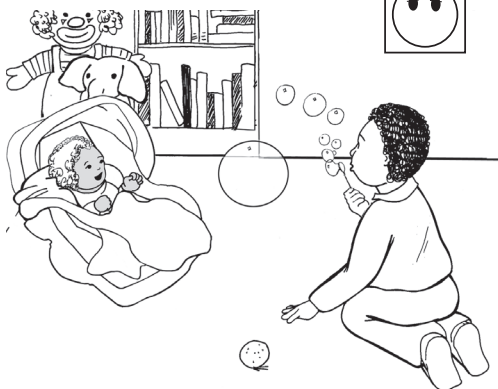
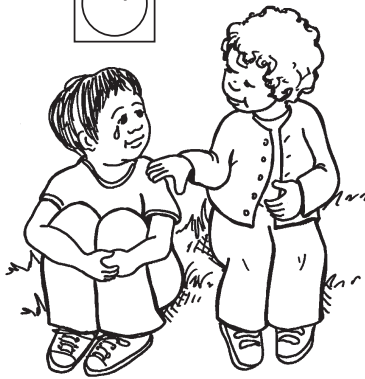
God blesses you...
Yes!



Blessing Moments

God gives us gifts of love that we call blessings.

There are many ways that we can be a blessing to others. Draw your happy face in the boxes beside the pictures of things you would like to do to be a blessing to others.



Share this blessing song with others.

The Blessing Song

(tune: "B-I-N-G-O")

Blessings are God's way of love,
and we are all a blessing.

B L E S S (clap as each letter is named)

B L E S S

B L E S S

And we are all a blessing.