

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.

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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.

The Focus for Ages 9–11

How might the children in your group come across the word “saint”? Is it in the name of your congregation? Are there schools in your community with that name? Might they have friends or classmates who have talked about saints’ days? Most children, if they think about it at all, probably have an understanding that a saint is someone who is holier than everyone else. All Saints Day, and this session, provide an opportunity to broaden their knowledge of saints of God, and to recognize themselves as saints as well.

The focus passage for this All Saints Day offers the story of the “Beatitudes,” a teaching of Jesus which speaks of blessings. Children

will be encouraged to think about the actions of a follower of Jesus which reflect living in God’s way. They will hear that when they follow this way of living they are in the company of God’s saints.

The Respond section of the session offers options which focus on the gospel reading (a matching game can help children learn verses of the Beatitudes) and other options which focus on the theme of All Saints Day. You can choose which direction you would like to follow with the children as both will meet the focus for the session. Pray that the children will find that they too are saints of God and that the blessings and teachings of Jesus are also for them.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Prepare a worship area with *white cloth*, *white pillar candle*, and *Bible*.
- ❑ 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 *paper* and *pencil crayons*.

Engage

- ❑ *Option:* bring *images of saints* from your tradition, or a *storybook about saints*, with illustrations.

Respond

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

- ❑ **Mural:** *copies of the resource sheet “A Saint of God” (p. 5)*, *felt markers or pencil crayons*, *reusable adhesive*
- ❑ **Matching game:** *card stock or heavy paper*, *envelopes*; make a set for each child by photocopying the focus passage, Matthew 5:1–12, onto the card stock; cut verses apart so each verse is divided at the word “for”; place sets of verses in an envelope, one for each child.
- ❑ **Labyrinth:** *copies of the resource sheet “Labyrinth” (p. 6)*, *pencils*



All Saints Day (Year A)

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To find ourselves in the company of God’s saints.

Gather

Greeting Welcome the children and greet each one by saying, “Good morning, Saint (*child’s name*).” Point out the white cloth on the worship table and explain that today is All Saints Day in the church year calendar. On All Saints Day, we celebrate all saints, living and dead.

Call to gather Invite the children to join you at the worship table and ask a child to light the candle.

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

Pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

O God, we gather here
to learn more about you and how to be your
community.
Help us to feel your presence with us. In
Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a signal that the Gather ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to think of people that they admire. This could be someone famous, such as a movie star, athlete, or world leader, or it might be a favourite relative, sibling, or friend. Distribute sheets of paper and invite children to draw a person-shaped outline on their papers, adding facial features, hair, clothing, and a distinctive item that symbolizes the person they admire. Then have them introduce their heroes to each other and say a bit about what characteristics they admire most. Explain that today’s session will offer a chance to learn about saints of the church, who have characteristics that others can admire. They will also be able to discover how we can all be saints.

Engage

Preparing for the story

An important Bible study skill for the children to learn is to discover background information and the setting for the story or event. Invite the children to find **Matthew 5:1–2** and invite a child to read it aloud. These verses tell us where Jesus is and to whom he is speaking, as well as giving us a sense of the occasion. Ask:

- **Where is Jesus? Who is with Jesus?**
- **Why did Jesus go up the mountain?**

The Bible story

Invite volunteers to read aloud the rest of the focus passage for this session, **Matthew 5:3–12**, taking turns in reading the verses as the rest of the group follows along. Help children understand words that may not be familiar, such as “meek” or “merciful.” Explain that this passage is known as the “Beatitudes” (refer to biblical background material on p.1). Jesus singles out

certain groups of people and reminds them that God has not forgotten them.

■ Which people are called blessed in this passage?

We sometimes think of saints as people who have a special holiness, so the groups of people mentioned in Jesus’ teaching may not be recognized as saints. We can think of saints as those who live in God’s way.

■ What do we learn about living God’s way from these teachings called the Beatitudes?

The Bible and our lives

All Saints Day is a good time to think about the blessings that we have, and to think about the people who have been a blessing in our lives. When we share God’s blessings with others we are part of the whole community of saints. If possible, look together at the storybooks or images of saints to learn more about historical or contemporary

figures. Or invite children to name some of the people they would consider to be saints.

■ **What are some of the ways that we can be saints of God, following Jesus' teaching?**

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Mural** We can all be saints of God. Invite the children to make a mural of saints to reinforce this understanding. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "A Saint of God" and markers or pencil crayons and invite children to create images of saints (discussed earlier), including themselves. Cut the figures out and display the figures in the learning space, with hands attached. Under or above each figure place an identification label.
- **Matching game** The teachings called the Beatitudes are a well-known section of scripture. Invite children to play a game to help the children make a stronger connection with this passage. Give each child a set of the verses and have them mix up the cards and then match the first part of each verse with the second parts. For a more challenging game have them try to arrange the completed verses in the order



found in the focus passage. Encourage children to take their games home to play with their families.

- **Labyrinth** As we try to follow God's way and live Jesus' teachings, we need to take time to be apart and think about such teachings. One way to do this is to walk the path of a labyrinth to meditate and pray. Labyrinths are usually found outdoors but some people also like to use a finger labyrinth. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Labyrinth" and help children find the place to begin and to see how following the path takes one into the middle of the labyrinth and then out to the beginning place again. Invite them to think about the saints in their lives as they move a finger along the path, or use a pencil to follow the path. Encourage the children to take their labyrinths home and use them for prayer or meditation.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to relight the candle. Recall today's conversation about what it means to be a blessing and what it means to be a saint.

Pray together this prayer or one of your own:

Dear God,
help us, your saints,
to be a blessing in the world. Amen.

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

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), God blesses you, and you are a blessing to others."

Reflect

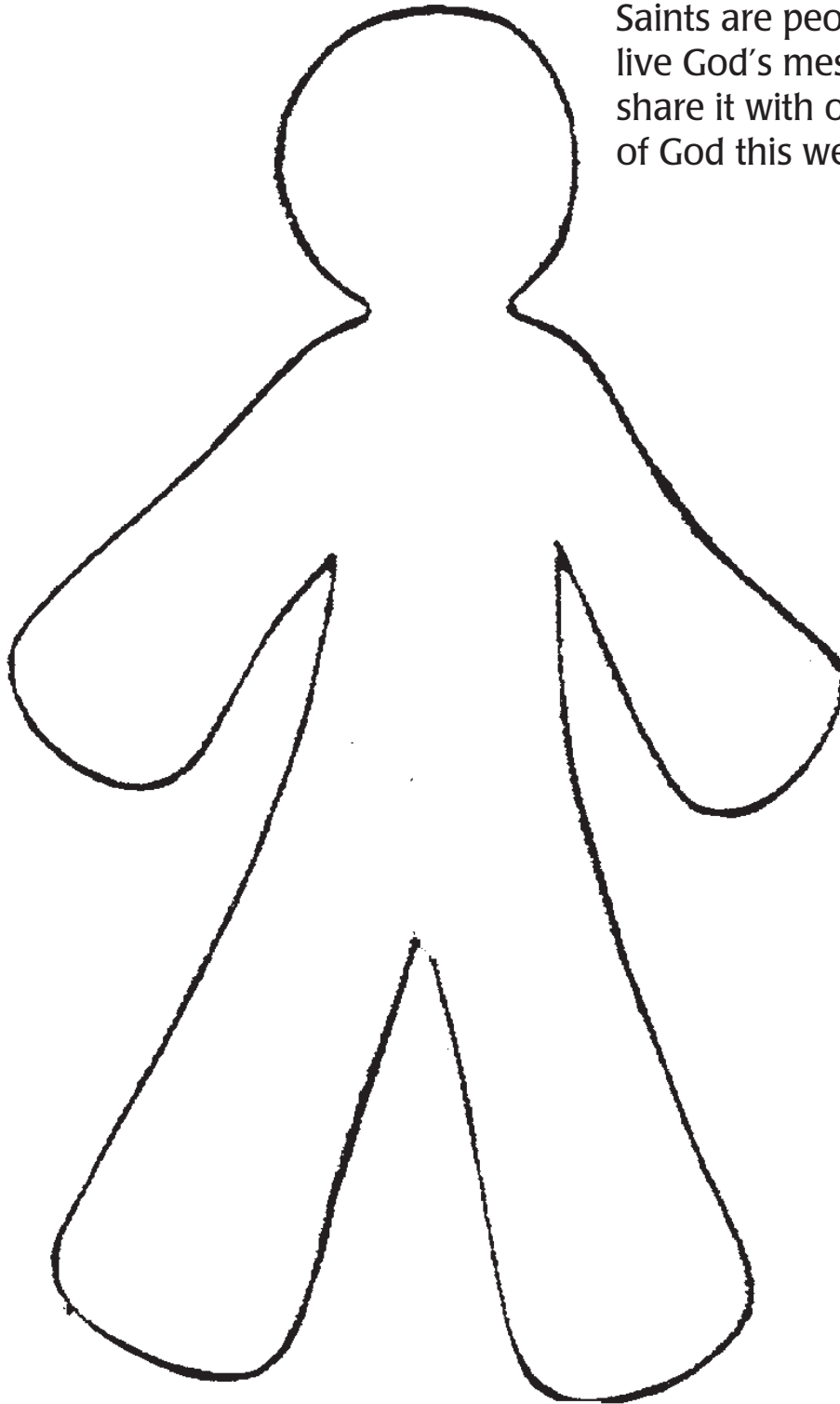
In what ways did children show they are beginning to realize they are saints of God? Where did you and the children see signs of God's blessing

during today's session? Were there any children who struggled to see themselves as blessings?



A Saint of God

Saints are people who work hard to live God's message of love and to share it with others. Watch for saints of God this week.





LABYRINTH

