

# 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.**

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## The Focus for Ages 5–12

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Children in this age group will have experienced blessings many times in their lives, and they are usually more open to a wider definition of what blessing means than are many adults. Many children are also aware that they themselves are a source of blessing to others. Most children, particularly if they live in openly affectionate and affirming homes, will have seen someone's face light up when they enter a room, or heard joy in another's voice when they say the child's name.

In the focus scripture for this day, Jesus' blessings do not name people, but are given to categories of people. In this session, the children will be able to think about how they are blessed and how they are blessings.

The Greek word that is translated "blessed" might also be translated as "happy," "full of joy," or "deeply happy." The word "Blessed" will be introduced to the children partly to maintain the traditional use of this word in the scripture reading, and partly because a new word is less likely to be confused with current meanings associated with the word "happiness."

On this Sunday we celebrate All Saints Day. This session invites them to consider themselves and those who show God's love in the world as belonging to the company of saints of God. Pray that each child in your group will join in giving thanks for the saints of the church and be open to being included in that number.

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## Prepare

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### 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* with a book-mark 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 *glitter glue* and *name tags* on which you have printed "Saint," leaving room for children to add their names.

### Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell story on the *resource sheet* "Teaching on the Mountain" (p. 6).
- ❑ For matching game group, bring *copies of the resource sheet* "Teaching on the Mountain," *card stock/heavy paper*, *markers*, and *scissors*.

### Respond

Gather or make the materials for the zones selected.

- ❑ **Art zone:** *mural paper*, *markers or crayons*
- ❑ **Cooperation zone:** *two star or triangle shapes* (about 15 cm/6 in across) cut from *poster board* for each child, *heavy yarn*, *drinking straws*, *markers or crayons*, *glitter*, *hole punch*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *copy of the resource sheet* "Teaching on the Mountain" (p. 6)
- ❑ **Meditation zone:** *copies of the resource sheet* "Labyrinth" (p. 7) *recording of meditative music*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *copies of resource sheet* "Saints of God Bookmarks" (p. 8), *pieces of poster board or card stock*, *hole punch*, *markers or crayons*, *ribbon*



# All Saints Day (Year A)

## Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

**FOCUS** To discover that we are blessed by God and called to be saints of God.

## Gather

**Welcome** the children and any guests.

### Opening ritual

**Gather** around the worship area and invite a child to light the candle. Point out the white cloth and mention that the colour white is used on celebration days. Today we are celebrating All Saints Day, a time to remember all the people in the past and present who love God and are followers of Jesus. Distribute name tags, and invite children to add their names and decorate with glitter. Gather in a circle and welcome each other by saying, “Welcome, Saint (*child’s name*)!”

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

**Pray** (*invite children to repeat each line after you*)  
Dear God,

we gather here today,  
to learn more about  
following in the way of Jesus  
and showing your love. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to show that the gathering ritual is over.

### 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. Explain that saints are people who have characteristics that others can admire. Saints are also those who help us to live in God’s way. Invite children to name other people they know or know of who show God’s love and can be called saints.

## Engage

### Preparing for the story

Have a child bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Matthew. Explain that the story for today comes from one of the gospels in the New Testament. Matthew is the first book of the New Testament. Show them the divider page that indicates the beginning of the New Testament.

### The Bible story

Tell the story of the teaching on the mount, using the resource sheet “Teaching on the Mountain,” which is based on **Matthew 5:1–12**.

### Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

**Song group** New words to the song “If You’re Happy and You Know It” provide this group with ways to think about being blessed by God. Sing the song or read the words below to the children:

If you’re blessed and you know it, pass it on.  
If you’re blessed and you know it, pass it on.  
We are blessed and we know it.  
And we surely want to show it.  
We are blessed. Jesus tells us, “Pass it on.”

Invite children to sing the song, shaking hands every time they sing, “We are blessed.” Pause after each time of singing the song to invite the children name ways that they are blessed or ways they can be blessings to others. If you have time, change the first and last line to: “You are blessed, Saint (*child’s name*), pass it on.” Sing the song once with each child’s name.

**Matching game group** Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Teaching on the Mountain” and invite this group to compare the paraphrase with the text of **Matthew 5:1–12**.

- 1 Read the words of Jesus in “Teaching on the Mountain.” Then read Matthew 5:3–12 in the Bible.
- 2 Match each sentence of Jesus’ teaching on the story page with the verses in Matthew 5.
- 3 Using the teachings from the story page or from the Bible, write each one on a piece of card stock or heavy paper.
- 4 Cut the teachings in half and mix the cards up.
- 5 Try to match the cards to get the complete sentences of Jesus’ teachings, checking them with the story page or Bible.

### The Bible story and us

Invite the song group to sing the song several times for the other children, taking turns shaking hands as they sing “We are blessed.” Invite the game group to demonstrate the game with several of the matching pairs of cards.

## Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Art zone: Wall of saints** We can all be saints of God. Invite the children to make a visual statement of this by creating a wall mural of saints. Tape a long strip of mural paper to a wall at a height that allows you to trace around the head and shoulders of each child. Invite the children to draw in their features and hair with crayons or markers and print their names below their figures. Add the title “Saints of God” to the mural and display in the meeting space.
- ❑ **Cooperation zone: Garland of blessing** All Saints Day is a good time to think about the blessings that we have, and the people who have been a blessing in our lives. Distribute two star or triangle shapes to each child and invite children to print their names on one of the shapes and the name of someone who has been a blessing in their lives on the other shape. Decorate with markers or crayons and punch a hole in the top of each one. String the shapes onto a length of yarn, placing segments of drinking straws between each one. Hang the garland in the learning space as a reminder of God’s blessings.
- ❑ **Quiet zone: Litany** Jesus named many people as blessed. Invite children to prepare a litany to name these groups. On the top of a sheet of newsprint, print the response for the litany prayer: “God, bless them.” Ask questions based on the teaching of Jesus on the resource sheet



“Teaching on the Mountain,” such as, “Who are people who might feel they are without hope? Encourage the children to name groups of people, such as people whose homes were destroyed, rather than specific names. On the newsprint, write the names of all the groups of people. To pray the litany together, rehearse the response. Then read each group of people and say the response together. Conclude with “Amen.”

- ❑ **Meditation zone: 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.
- ❑ **Outreach zone: Bookmarks** Saints are people who help us to follow Jesus’ teachings and live in God’s way. Distribute copies of the resource

sheet “Saints of God Bookmarks” and review the instructions. Invite children to make bookmark gifts for the saints in their lives, encouraging them to each make several bookmarks.

Consider making them for the leaders of your congregation as well as the people the children name.

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## Bless

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**Gather** Invite children to gather at the worship table. Light the candle, or ask a child to light it. Recall today’s conversation about what it means to be a blessing and what it means to be a saint. Invite children to share something from the activities in which they participated during Respond.

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

**Pray** this prayer or one of your own:

Thank you, God, for the people who  
have saved these stories about you and  
your people  
so we can hear them today. Amen.

**Blessing** Say to each child, “(Child’s name), God blesses you, for you are a saint of God.”

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## Reflect

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How did the children express their understanding of the meaning of saints? In what ways did children show they are beginning to realize they

are saints of God? Where did you see signs of God’s blessings during this session?





# TEACHING ON THE MOUNTAIN

(based on Matthew 5:1–12)

If you have space, invite the children to follow you as you walk around the learning space. Begin the story and have everyone sit down when the disciples sit down.

Jesus' days were busy. He walked all over Galilee, teaching in synagogues and healing the sick. He taught the good news of God's plan for everyone. People told their friends, and crowds of people came when they heard Jesus was heading their way.

When Jesus saw the crowd of people, he went up the mountain. The disciples, Jesus' closest friends, went along. When they came to a small flat area, Jesus sat down. This was a signal for the others to sit down too because Jesus was going to teach them. The crowd of people was nearby, so they could hear Jesus' words too.

After time to rest, Jesus began to teach the disciples, saying,

"Blessed are people who feel hopeless, for they will again know that God is with them.

"Blessed are the people who see the deep hurts in the world, for they will see that God is with them.

"Blessed are the people who wait for God's ways to cover the earth, for they will see the greatness of God.

"Blessed are the people who look for justice and fairness for everyone, for they will see the mercy of God.

"Blessed are the people who show kindness to others, for they will know the forgiveness of God.

"Blessed are the people who seek to follow God's way, for they will know themselves to be in the presence of God.

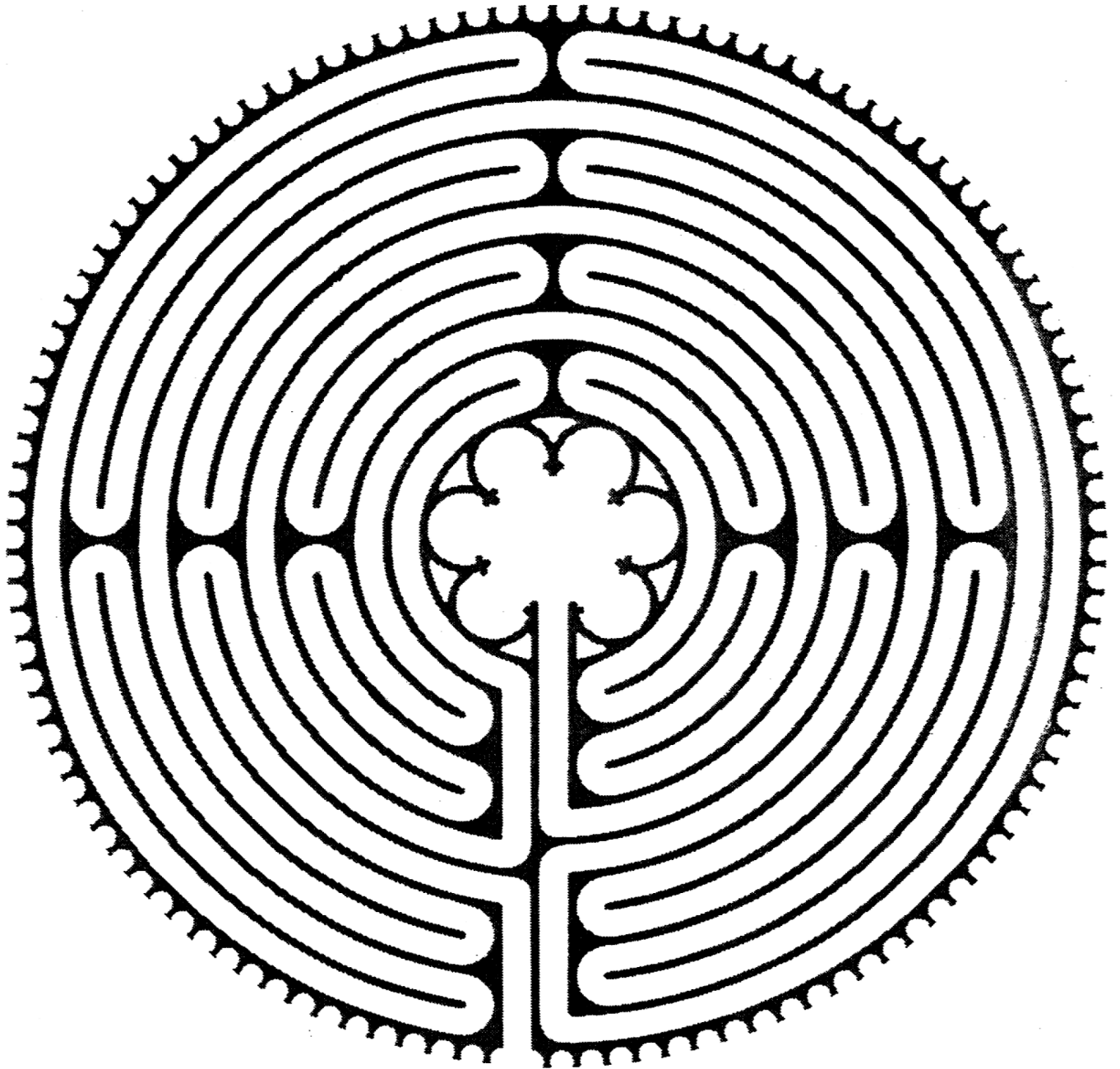
"Blessed are the people who work for peace, for they will know that they are children of God.

"Blessed are the people who are shamed or punished for following God's way, for they will be with God forever.

"Blessed are you when people call you names because you love God. Be full of joy for God will not forget you."



# LABYRINTH





# Saints of God Bookmarks

## Materials

- card stock or heavy paper, cut into rectangles
- markers
- hole punch
- ribbon

## Directions

- 1 Select someone you know who is a saint of God.
- 2 Print that person's name on one side of the bookmark.
- 3 On the other side, print: You are a saint of God.
- 4 Punch a hole near the top of the bookmark.
- 5 Put a piece of ribbon through the hole and tie it in place.
- 6 Deliver or send your bookmark to the person.

