



Week of December 15-21

Third Sunday of Advent

Sunday's Readings

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10
Psalm 146

James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to him with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

Matthew 11:2-3

Prepare Ye the Way...

Sunday's Gospel was a reminder of how difficult the life of a prophet was. Like many other prophets, John was imprisoned because he upset people with his message of repentance and reform.



- Why would such a message make people mad?

Remind students that John was eventually killed for preaching a truthful message.

John knew from the beginning of his ministry that he was not the long-awaited Messiah. He was only the "warm-up" guy.

Spread Sunday's News

In order to put Sunday's Gospel Reading into its proper historical place we have to jump ahead in time. The passage tells a story that took place many years after Jesus' birth. In fact, Jesus was grown and fully into his ministry. John on the other hand was coming to the end of his ministry and his life. What happened in this passage was another phase of the transition between John and Jesus.



Sunday's story found John in prison. Why was he there?

Even after being arrested and put in prison, John had not stopped caring about the people. He had heard stories about Jesus and he needed to make sure this person now teaching his followers was in fact the Messiah, the long-awaited one who was the fulfillment of his preaching. John was also interested in the message of Jesus.

Jesus' answer shows how he is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He is fulfilling these prophecies right before everyone's eyes. That being said, Jesus delivers a tribute to John, the one who spent his life setting the stage for Jesus.

Soon after this scene John will be executed.

Just Wondering ...



Sunday's **Second Reading from James** has some beautiful images of the virtue of patience.

- What is patience? Some students are probably having a hard time WAITING for Christmas. That is what Advent is all about, **waiting patiently for God** (*not Santa*) to come among us.
- Why is it so hard for us to wait for things? (*This is especially true of children born in an age of instant everything!*)
- Discuss things students have a difficult time waiting for. (*Include your own things, too.*)

You should know...



A prophet is someone chosen by God to speak in his name and guide the people of Israel. Isaiah, Elijah and Jeremiah were prophets of God.

Cross out the names of those who are NOT prophets.

- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- ~~Matthew~~
- Jonah
- ~~Job~~
- Joel
- Zechariah

You should know...

For centuries, the "O Antiphons" have been prayed and sung in the Church. They are the source for the hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Challenge

Look around your house for something you know must be done before Christmas. Help your family by doing it without being asked.



In Jesus' Name ...

What can I learn about my own faith from John the Baptist's faith and his courage?

Sunday's words from James, "Be patient...until the coming of the Lord," remind me it's hard for me to be patient because...



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Saint Story of the Week

Saturday, December 21



St. Peter Canisius, 1521-1597

St. Peter's 76 years of life were characterized by cheerfulness as he went about doing the dozens of tasks God placed before him. His German homeland was deeply involved in the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. Many Germans were attracted to the new religions which the Reformation brought about.

After undergoing many reforms within, the Church made great efforts to attract and invigorate its members. Peter was deeply involved with the spreading and renewal of Catholicism in Germany and other surrounding countries.

A man of education, Peter received a Master's Degree when he was only 19. He joined the newly formed Society of Jesus (*Jesuits*). St. Ignatius of Loyola, one of the founders of the Jesuits, was one of Peter's teachers. The Jesuits and other religious communities were (*and are*) indispensable as teachers and missionaries in Europe and America.

Peter was a prolific writer and preacher who also encouraged others to write. He is credited with the founding of the Catholic Press. Peter wanted all people to have access to the teachings of the Church, so he wrote teaching documents (*catechisms*) for instruction. (*Named a Doctor of the Church in 1925 by Pope Pius XI.*)

Gather Together



- See this week's **Just Wondering...** (*facing page*)
- Read the entire **Second Reading** (*James 5:7-10*).
- The image of the farmer waiting is perfect for helping children understand the waiting process. No matter what other "instant" things we have in our society today, farmers and others who grow plants still have to wait for the seeds to sprout and grow. So far, there is no instant way to do this!

Lord Jesus, I am patiently waiting and preparing for your birth. May you find me ready to receive you with a heart full of love. Amen.

Next Sunday's Good News



All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."

Matthew 1:22-23

Think about ...

What do you suppose was Joseph's first reaction to the appearance of an angel in his dream?



Week of December 22-28 Sunday's Readings

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-14
Psalm 24

Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-24

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us." Matthew 1:22-23

Prepare Ye the Way...

Because Matthew's Gospel was written for Jewish Christians, it was important for him to connect the life and ministry of Jesus with the prophecies of the Old Testament that foretold the birth of a messiah. Sunday's First Reading from Isaiah is a perfect example of this technique:



"The Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel."

Spread Sunday's News

Descriptions of an encounter with God during a dream were familiar to Jewish Christians. Sunday's Gospel describes the first of Joseph's several dreams where God speaks to him through an angel.



- This dream assured Joseph that it was all right to take Mary as his wife.

Joseph, being a faithful Jew himself, was aware of the other Old Testament figures who had experienced these encounters with God. He was also familiar with Sunday's Scripture passage from Isaiah. Joseph must have realized and at the same time wondered about his role in the fulfillment of the prophecy. His faith helped him do whatever God asked him to do.

- Joseph's other dreams: taking Mary and Jesus to Egypt to avoid the slaying of the male children; bringing his family back after the danger was over. (*These stories will come later.*)
- Discuss Mary's fears and joys at this time in her life. Her recent visit with Elizabeth must have been exciting for her, especially as they discussed the coming births of their unusual sons.

Just Wondering ...



- Have a short discussion about dreams. Students can share dreams they remember.
- Sometimes when we wake up from a dream it can seem as though it was really happening to us. After a while we realize it was just a story created in our imaginations.
- But Joseph knew his encounter with God through the angel was real and that God was really sending him an important message.
- We're going to hear about Joseph's other dreams during the next few weeks.

The term *angel* comes from words meaning "messenger." God uses angels many times in the Bible to communicate with human beings. What about other stories of angels acting as messengers? Can students name any of these?

(An angel tells Zechariah he is going to have a son (John the Baptist); an angel informs Mary she is to be Jesus' mother; angels announce Jesus' birth to the shepherds; angels tell the women at the tomb that Jesus has risen from the dead. There are also many other encounters with angels as both messengers and protectors.)

You should know...



St. Luke wrote the only Gospel that tells the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth and the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

Try This

- What are the usual preparations a family makes when they are expecting a new child. What did Mary and Joseph do to prepare for their baby?
 - Prepare to give a pretend baby shower for Mary and Jesus.
 - Have children draw pictures of the gifts they would bring to the shower. (*If you have a classroom or school Christmas tree, design these gifts to be ornaments for that tree.*)
 - They must be ready to explain WHY they would bring each gift.
 - Pray for babies around the world and their families.
- OR
- Encourage children to save their money for a real baby present.
 - Collect money and/or presents after Christmas vacation in association with the feast of Epiphany
 - Donate them to Birthright or another charity that serves infants and mothers.

Challenge

Prepare to hear the Christmas story by reading Chapters 1 and 2 of St. Luke's Gospel. Read a little each day with your family before or after dinner. Take turns reading out loud.



In Jesus' Name ...

When we wake up after a dream, everything in that dream is over and gone. An angel really visited Joseph in his dream. Later we'll hear about other times an angel visited Joseph in a dream. Joseph always trusted that the angel was speaking for God and willingly did what he was told.



Saint Story of the Week

Thursday, December 26

St. Stephen, died c. 34



The ministry and death of Stephen are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 6 and 7. We know from this text that Stephen was appointed a deacon to help distribute the resources of the early Church to those in need. His holiness and virtue made some jealous and angry, and these individuals forced a confrontation between Stephen and members of the Sanhedrin. This led to Stephen's martyrdom.

One cannot help but draw parallels between his death and that of Christ. Jesus made his fellow Jews angry with some of his words, actions and teachings. Stephen did the same, especially by refocusing some of the longtime Jewish practices.

Gather Together



- Use a short reading from one of the Scripture passages for Advent (*found in a missalette*) or let the children react/pray spontaneously.
- Close the service with this refrain.

Rejoice! Rejoice! O Israel.
To thee shall come Emmanuel.
Come, Lord Jesus!

Next Sunday's Good News

[Joseph] went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazorean."



Matthew 2:23

Think about ...

How does the Feast of the Holy Family remind us to be holy?



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Week of April 12-18

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

After the sabbath ... Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.

Matthew 28:1-2

Prepare Ye the Way...

Matthew's Easter Gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene came to Jesus' tomb. She was probably bringing spices to anoint his body.

(Recall that on the feast of Epiphany we looked at the symbolism of each gift given by the magi. Myrrh was the foreshadowing of Jesus' death.)



Spread Sunday's News

Anointing a body was part of Jewish custom, usually carried out by women. It was the fulfillment of this ritual practice that brought Mary and the women to the tomb on Easter morning. There they encountered the angel (*another angel messenger!*) who announced Jesus had risen from the dead.



- The angel's description is reminiscent of the angel's announcement of the birth of Christ.
- The description of how the angel looked reminds us of the figures of Moses, Elijah and Jesus at the Transfiguration.
- Think about how the women felt while they were being given specific instructions on how to deliver the news.
- Why would they be afraid? Is it possible to receive such news and NOT be afraid?
- Did the women anticipate facing doubt and skepticism from the Apostles? Would YOU believe such a story?
- The Gospel says the women did homage to Jesus when they met him on their way to Galilee, just as the magi did when they found the Infant Jesus.

Just Wondering ...



Take a few minutes to talk about what students experienced during the Easter liturgy. Even if it is just the flowers, they have hopefully experienced something joyful, a climax to all the serious themes during Lent and Holy Week.

- Ask the students which parts of the Mass have now returned. (*The Gloria and the Alleluia are being sung again.*)
- Take your class into church. Let them smell the flowers. The sense of smell can cause some lasting memories.

(continued on the facing page)

Easter Sunday's Readings

Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Psalm 118
Colossians 3:1-4 or
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

Easter Sequence
John 20:1-9 or
Matthew 28:1-10



You should know...

The Easter Season

The octave of Easter lasts eight days, ending this coming Sunday. Each day this week is referred to as **Easter**, indicating the significance of the feast—each day is an Easter Day.

In the past, all who were baptized during the Easter Vigil remained clothed in their white garments for the entire octave. They also continued their instruction in the Church, a period called *mystagogia*, when the mysteries of the Eucharist were revealed to them, now fully initiated into the fullness of Christ's life and members of the Christian community.

The Easter Season lasts for the next 50 days. Lent was only 40 days, so what does this say about the Church's focus on Easter? Like Christmas, Easter is an entire season, not just a one-day feast.

There are no saints' feast days this week.

Use the Responsorial Psalm from Easter Sunday for prayer.

Use a bell to stop your class periodically and sing one of your parish's favorite joyful settings of the "Alleluia."

Read Sunday's First Reading from Acts to the class. Call attention to the part about how the community had "all things in common."

What can the class share in common this week? During the entire Easter Season?

Challenge

Celebrate Jesus' Resurrection by going around with a pleasant smile on your face. If you feel happy about your birthday, you should also feel joyful on Easter. Let others know why you are happy.



In Jesus' Name ...

It is hard for me to imagine how Mary and the felt when she realized Jesus' tomb was empty. I wonder if she...



Easter Liturgies

- Gather around the baptismal font. Allow each student to dip his/her fingers into the water making the Sign of the Cross. This sign and its words are used during the Rite of Baptism.
- Get close to the new Easter candle. Do students know what it represents?
- What do symbols imprinted on it stand for? What are the alpha and omega and what do they represent?

(Get a copy of the Sacramentary [the book used by the presiding priest at Mass] or a missalette to find the beginning of the Easter Vigil Service of Light. You will find an explanation of the symbols on the candle.)

- Point out that BIG candle will burn during liturgies throughout the Easter Season. It will be used for all baptisms and funerals for the next year.
- Read the text of the Exsultet so students will have a better understanding of the meaning of the Easter candle. After all the beautiful flowers and decorations are long gone, the Easter candle remains.



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Gather Together

- Pass the Lenten promise slips back to their owners. Give them a few minutes to look at them and then each child should tear up his/hers into small pieces. As students do this, tell them to think about how well they did with the promise they made.
- Give out another small piece of paper and tell students to write a promise or goal for the 50 days of Easter.
- Have them take these promises home and place them by their beds (*or in another place*).
- Tell students to save them until Pentecost. Then open up the papers and consider how well they kept their promises.
- Sing a familiar setting of the “Alleluia.”

Next Sunday's Good News



Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”

John 20:27

Think about ...

Why do you think Thomas refused to believe what the disciples were telling him about Jesus?



Week of June 7-13

The Most Holy Trinity

Sunday's Readings

Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9
Daniel 3

2 Corinthians 13:11-13
John 3:16-18

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.
John 3:16

Prepare Ye the Way...

- Ask students to define the word *eternal*. Put their list on the board.
- Here are some synonyms:
everlasting, never-ending, endless, perpetual, undying, immortal, permanent, enduring, infinite, timeless, constant
- Carefully pray the *Glory Be (Doxology)* together.
- Is there a "definition" of eternal in this prayer?
- As humans is it even possible for us to grasp what the word *eternal* means: *without beginning, exists now, and always will exist?*



You should know...

The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) follows the Sign of Peace. After the Agnus Dei we kneel.

Spread Sunday's News

Thoughts on the Readings: Focus on Faith

Recall the discussion of *believe* during Easter Week (April 23). Thomas doubted, but his doubts were resolved when he personally encountered Jesus.

The Gospel for the Ascension told us the disciples worshiped Jesus, but they also doubted.

The Gospel for Trinity Sunday speaks again of belief. "Whoever believes in [Jesus] will not be condemned."

- What do we believe and how do we know it is true?
- Careful praying and discussion of the **Apostles' Creed** or the **Nicene Creed** can help with this.
- Discuss belief from a secular perspective.
- People tell us things all the time.
- Commercials bombard everyone with information.
- What should we believe?

We must learn to separate the good things our friends tell us from the things that lead us into trouble. We work very hard to develop a strong sense of values in children, hoping they will learn to make correct choices, even when the crowd is trying to take them in wrong directions. That is why developing the skill of "what to believe" is so important.



Just Wondering ...

- Read the week's Gospel passage (top of this page).
- The key idea is that God loved us so much he gave his only Son.
- Parents rarely if ever choose to send their children into harm's way, putting them in danger of death.
- But God sent Jesus for all of us, in order that we might have eternal life. The gift results in another gift! Why would God do such a thing for us?



Challenge

Choose one or two of Jesus' sayings you heard this year. Write them down, place the paper in a place where you will see it. Think about what those words mean in your life today and every day from now on.



In Jesus' Name ...

I know Jesus came into the world so I might have eternal life.

I believe this because...

I imagine eternal life with Jesus might be...



For All the Saints

Saturday, June 13



St. Anthony of Padua, 1195-1231

Born in Portugal, Ferdinand de Bulhoes initially joined the Augustinian Order. Later, he became acquainted with the missionary work of the Franciscan community. Because he felt called to this kind of work, he decided he belonged with the Franciscans. When he took his religious vows, he chose the name Anthony.

The community sent Anthony to Morocco, but soon an illness made it necessary for him to return home. On the way home, his ship blew off course and he ended up in Italy instead of Portugal. His arrival coincided with a meeting of all the Franciscans which had been called by St. Francis himself.

During this meeting, Anthony was asked to preach. At first he declined, but as a result of his life-long study of Scripture and his devotion to prayer, Anthony's gift for preaching was discovered.

God called Anthony to do many different things and because of this his life changed direction many times. Anthony always trusted God would show him what needed to be done.

St. Anthony of Padua is one of the greatest writers and preachers in the Church's history. He was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church on January 16, 1946.

Gather Together



- Pause your classes at regular intervals and recite the Glory Be together.
- What other familiar short prayer helps us dedicate what we say/do to the Trinity? (*The Sign of the Cross*)
- Encourage students to use it often throughout their lives.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
based on Revelation 1:8

Next Sunday's Good News



This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.

John 6:58

Think about ...

Last week we heard how all who believe in Jesus will have eternal life. This week, Jesus is the living bread for us to eat in order to live forever.

Week of June 14-20

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.

John 6:58

Prepare Ye the Way...

- Read (or tell) the story of God sending manna and quail to feed the Israelites in the desert after they were freed from slavery in Egypt (*Exodus 16*).
- God's love for the Israelites was very evident; their nutritional needs were taken care of until they reached the Promised Land forty years later.
- God wanted them to be happy, yet just as he did with Adam and Eve, God placed some restrictions on them.
- They were not to gather more than they needed except when they gathered enough to prepare for the Sabbath.



(continued)

Spread Sunday's News

Jesus pointed out that even with the manna, all those in the desert eventually died. To eat and drink of the Body and Blood of Jesus means that although we will eventually suffer the physical death of our bodies, our souls will never die.



Sunday's Gospel is taken from what is known as the **Bread of Life Discourse from Chapter 6 in the Gospel of John**. Jesus' words in these passages refer to the Eucharist, the gift of his Body and Blood which he left us for our spiritual nourishment.

Recall the Gospel preparation for the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well on the Third Sunday of Lent (*March 23*). Jesus offered the woman the gift of "living water."

- What Sacrament gives us the gift of living water? (*Baptism*)
- What Sacrament offers us the gift of living bread? (*Eucharist*)

Remind students these two Sacraments are part of the three Sacraments of Initiation. The other is Confirmation.

Just Wondering ...



We discussed ancestors and descendants when we heard the story of Zacchaeus during the week of November 3. Also in November the children brought in pictures of deceased relatives. Emphasize that because these family members lived BEFORE us they were our ancestors. Even our parents are our ancestors.

The ancestors Jesus is talking about in Sunday's Gospel are our ancestors in faith, those whom God freed from slavery in Egypt and fed with the manna from heaven.

- Recall the discussions about the living water Jesus offered the Samaritan Woman. What is living water?
- What does Jesus mean when he calls himself "the living bread...?"

Sunday's Readings

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
Psalm 147 John 6:51-58



You should know...

The bishops ask us to bow reverently before we receive Communion, the Sacred Body of Christ, and again if we receive Jesus' Precious Blood.

- Those who disobeyed, who did not trust God, found their extra hoards spoiled and wormy.
- Jesus' listeners were familiar with the story of the manna.

Challenge

Make sure to spend time considering what the Eucharist means in your life. What will you do to show your appreciation for this gift?



In Jesus' Name ...

In the Gospel for the Third Sunday of Lent, Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water. Now Jesus tells us he is the living bread, and if we eat this bread we will live forever.

I believe both of these truths because...



Saint Story of the Week

Sunday, June 21



St. Aloysius Gonzaga, 1568-1591

Aloysius' father was a respected Italian nobleman and soldier who had plans for his son to follow in his footsteps. At the age of four his father took him to a military camp where he marched with the soldiers.

Young Aloysius was even given the opportunity to fire a gun, which literally backfired in his face, leaving him with burns. After that he was forbidden to touch the guns! Soon his youthful defiance motivated him to explore a real cannon, which he fired accidentally, causing quite a stir in the camp.

Early in life Aloysius began to pray and do penance. His father would find him alone in his room praying, refusing to stop even to eat. When kidney disease left him bedridden, he considered it a blessing because it gave him the opportunity to remain in silent prayer for hours.

Although his father expected him to take over the family's responsibilities, Aloysius wanted no part of what he saw as a morally corrupt society. He wanted to become a member of the Jesuits, believing that through them he could make a difference in the world. His father was extremely opposed to the whole idea, but finally gave in after four years of persuasion.

Aloysius signed over his family responsibilities to his younger brother and entered the Jesuit community. Once there, he asked to do the things no one else wanted to do like scrubbing floors and washing dishes (see also *Martin de Porres* [November 3] and *André Bessette* [January 6]).

He looked forward to meeting the poor at the gates of the monastery to distribute food and care for the sick. Other members of the community were in awe of this young man who was so devout. He showed a deep devotion to Christ in the Eucharist, spending days in thanksgiving for receiving it, followed by days of preparation in order to receive it again.

When a deadly plague broke out in 1591, there were sick and dying people everywhere. The young Jesuit insisted on going into the streets to care for as many as possible, washing them, praying with them. He eventually caught the disease himself.

He was only 23 when he died, a death he predicted to happen within the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi (*The Body and Blood of Christ*).

Gather Together



- Instead of gathering in the **Prayer Place**, take your class to your church and allow them to experience prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.
- If possible, arrange for it to be exposed so that all in your students can experience this kind of prayer.
- Ask students to spend some time thinking about how much the Eucharist means to them.

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed. Amen.

The Good News for the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul is:



Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Matthew 10:30-31

Think about...

Can you imagine how difficult the pope's job is? Pray for him often.