



Week of December 13-19

Third Sunday of Advent

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

Firm Up the Foundation

It is interesting to note that both *testimony* and *testify* came from the Latin *testificare*, which comes from *testis* meaning “a witness.” When these words are applied to religion or the law it is assumed that statements and evidence produced are true. The law adds an oath to swear to tell the truth.



So from this Scripture passage we know that John’s words were true and serve as evidence that his statements are true.

Spread Sunday’s News

There is a lot of courtroom drama, both real and fictitious, on television and other forms of media. Hopefully students have seen enough of it to understand how important the testimony of John was.



Just like a courtroom witness, John the Baptist was obligated to tell the truth. But John was also reiterating the fact that he was not the Messiah. Instead, John was testifying to something he knew would happen in the future. That is part of what a prophet does.

Although he knew how dangerous his words were, he continued to preach and baptize. John also testified by action. Remember, words are important, but as Jesus said, it is our actions that speak volumes.

As Christians, we are sometimes called upon to give testimony of our faith because we live in a world not always ready to accept the message of Jesus.

The lives of John the Baptist and the saints show us we need courage to live and testify about that message despite possible ridicule and rejection, or in the case of some of the saints, death.

Just Wondering ...



- What would happen at night if the cars, trucks, boats, planes and busses did not have lights?
- Stress the importance of these lights to show the way, keeping us safe on our travels.
- What does it mean when we say Jesus is our Light?
- How can we tell others that Jesus is the Light?
- What can we do to testify to the world that we are followers of Jesus?
- When we testify about Jesus in the world, what message are we trying to deliver?
- Which is more important: What we say or what we do?

Sunday’s Readings

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11
Luke 1:46-48, etc.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Matthew 11:2-3



You should know...

Pope St. Evaristus, pope 97-107

Evaristus was probably the fourth pope to succeed Peter. His papacy followed the great St. Clement I. He was pope as the first century of the Church changed into the second.

Oddly enough, although we know little about his papacy, his birth record has somehow survived. **It seems he was the son of a Hellenic Jew and lived his early life in Bethlehem.**

Challenge

Promise yourself that you will testify about Jesus either by what you do or what you say.



In Christ, I Can ...



Jesus wants me to testify about the truth of the Gospel by my words and actions.

Which of my actions testifies to others about the Good News of Jesus?

Saint Story of the Week

December 13

St. Lucy, died 304



Although we really do not know a lot about Lucy, stories about her life have been passed down to us through many centuries.

When she was very young, her mother arranged for her to marry a pagan man. She stalled for a long time, hoping the marriage would never happen because she wanted to live as a virgin, dedicating herself solely to Christ.

Tradition says that in an attempt to change her mother's mind about the marriage, she took her mother to pray at the grave of St. Agatha. While they were praying, Lucy's mother was cured of a condition she had suffered from for many years. After this, Lucy's mother decided her daughter did not need to marry.

When her pagan bridegroom discovered her intentions and her Christianity, he denounced her and sent her to be executed.

The name "Lucy" means "bringer of light." Early accounts of her life tell us that she was tortured, including the removal of her eyes. Before her death, her sight was restored, thus she is considered the patron saint of the blind. Her tormenters tried to burn her alive, but the fire kept going out. Finally she was stabbed to death.

The story of St. Lucy is one of holiness and purity. She is one of very few saints, especially women, to be mentioned by name in Eucharistic Prayer I, which tells us how much she was and is revered by the Church.

There are customs throughout the world related to St. Lucy. In some countries, the oldest daughter dresses in white, and with candles on her head, processes throughout the house bringing treats. The gondoliers in Venice love to sing "Santa Lucia."

Gather Together



- Go to the **Prayer Zone**.
- Use Sunday's **Response to the First Reading, "My soul rejoices in my God."**
- The text for this response is not a psalm but the text for the Magnificat. (*Use a missalette to help you with the text.*)
- Ask: Is there anything that makes your soul rejoice like Mary rejoiced in God?
- Close with the prayer below, a favorite Advent song, or another prayer.

Lord Jesus, please help me testify about your love for everyone, especially by showing respect for the dignity of all people. Amen.

Next Sunday's Good News



The angel [Gabriel] said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Luke 1:30

Think about ...

Have I found favor with God? How do I know?



Week of December 20-26

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sunday's Readings

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
Psalm 89

Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

The angel [Gabriel] said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Luke 1:30

Firm Up the Foundation

The angel told Mary not to worry because she had found favor with God. On the other hand, God's favor also meant she would face many difficulties in the future.



To help children understand a little more about Mary's experience, invite them to think of synonyms for the word *favor* as it is used in the Gospel. (The list might include: favorable, favorite, favoritism, approval, honor, affection.)

Spread Sunday's News

Most children (*adults, too!*) like to hear scary stories, but they want no part of being scared themselves!



- Ask children to recall a time when someone whom they were not expecting walked up from behind and surprised them.

The normal first reaction is to feel frightened, even if only for a split second. Once we recognize the person as someone we know, our fear usually goes away.

But what happens if we turn around and a stranger is behind us? That may be what Mary experienced when all of a sudden an angel was standing next to her.

We have the privilege of knowing the story of Gabriel's visit to Mary: when it happened, how it ended. But young Mary was completely taken by surprise. In fact, the story says she was troubled.

- What other emotions might have been experienced by Mary?

This story, and Mary's human emotions, help us know and understand her. If we found ourselves in her situation, we would, no doubt, react the same way. But would we be willing to say YES to what God was asking?

Just Wondering ...

Depending on the age level of your students, discuss the consequences and realities of her obedience to God.



- Mary and Joseph were betrothed to one another, a serious, permanent binding contract in the Jewish community so the two were actually already married to one another.
- The Gospel tells us they were not yet living together, so what would people think of her when they discovered she was pregnant? (Unfortunately such situations are common now, but in Biblical times Mary's condition was extremely serious.)
- Was Mary at least a little afraid to explain her situation to Joseph or was she sure he would believe an angel visited her?
- Would you believe her story?

You should know...



Pope St. Leo III, pope 795-816

The day Pope Adrian I was buried, Leo III was unanimously chosen as his successor. One of the first things Leo did was send the keys of the succession of St. Peter to Charlemagne, a symbol of the anticipated fellowship and protection Leo hoped would happen between Church and state. This turned out to be a very smart move. Charlemagne did all he could to protect Leo from harm.

Leo was attacked by some supporters of his predecessor Adrian as he participated in a religious procession. Although seriously wounded, he was miraculously healed. When it came time for his attackers to be tried for their crimes, Charlemagne was there to make sure his friend Leo had justice served. The accusers were sentenced to death, but Leo's compassion turned the death sentence into exile.

Charlemagne donated lavishly to the papacy, and Leo used the money to help the poor and restore a lot of churches that were in disrepair. **On Christmas Day 800, Leo crowned Charlemagne the first king of the Holy Roman Empire.**

Challenge

Do a favor for your family. Help them get ready for Christmas by doing what you are asked to do with a smile on your face.



In Christ, I Can ...

The Gospel tells me Mary was "greatly troubled" by the angel's greeting. I think I would be afraid, too, because ...



Saint Story of the Week

Saturday, 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 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



- Go to the **Prayer Zone**.
- During the season of Christmas, most are looking forward to family gatherings. However, not everyone has a family or the opportunity to gather with friends or loved ones.
- Pray for all families; all children, especially those who do not have a home or a family; those waiting to be adopted; the poor, the lonely, the homeless who are likely cold and hungry and all the sick; soldiers who are serving our country, and their families; women who will give birth to a baby soon, etc.
- Add spontaneous petitions.
- Conclude with a familiar Christmas carol.

Lord Jesus, protect all families, especially children, from harm in their homes, neighborhoods and cities. Amen.

Next Sunday's Good News

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

Luke 2:19-20

Think about ...

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



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Week of Dec. 27-Jan. 2

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

Firm Up the Foundation

Contrary to what we experience in society, the **Christmas Season** does not begin in the Church until Christmas Mass is celebrated. It continues into January through the Feast of Epiphany.



Singing Christmas songs and carols is appropriate all through the Christmas Season. Use Christmas hymns, songs and carols as part of your class prayers.

Spread Sunday's News

The Feast of the Holy Family

Sometimes we forget that Jesus and his family were, above all, devout Jews. Joseph and Mary brought their new baby to the temple to present him to God, offering the prescribed sacrifices of thanksgiving for Jesus' birth. Simeon and Anna were doing what they always did in the temple—praying.



Point out the difference between the synagogue and the temple. The synagogue was/is a local place of worship with a rabbi (*teacher*) to guide the faithful. Jews attend synagogue regularly. For those who do not live in Jerusalem, the temple involves a long journey. Attendance at the temple is usually limited to special occasions and feasts. Worshipping at the temple may have been a rare privilege for Joseph and Mary.

Now You Know

In the Gospel, the heavenly host is a large army of the good angels. Their leader was the angel of the Lord.

Just Wondering ...



- What kinds of responsibilities were Mary and Joseph about to face?

They would have to provide for a new baby, which meant food, clothing, shelter, and a commitment to raising a child.

- When Mary said YES to God she completely trusted that she and her baby would be taken care of.
- That's where she differs from us. We question God, sometimes putting conditions on our yesses. Mary simply and unconditionally trusted God, knowing he would take care of her and her family.

Sunday's Readings

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
or Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3
Psalm 105 or 128

Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19
or Colossians 3:12-21
Luke 2:22-40
or Luke 2:22, 39-40

Luke 2:19-20



You should know...

Pope St. Sylvester I, pope 314-335

Pope Sylvester succeeded Pope Miltiades just as Christians were beginning to be free from persecution by order of Constantine. With its new freedom, the Church was also in need of organization. Sylvester enjoyed a peaceful relationship with the emperor. **He built great churches (with the support of Constantine), including the Basilica of St. Peter. He also converted the Lateran Palace into a great church.**

Perhaps his most noteworthy accomplishment was assembling the great Council of Nicaea which dealt with the Arian heresy. From this Council came the Nicene Creed which we say each Sunday during the Eucharist.

Some countries celebrate Sylvester's feast day as an end-of-the-year festival known as Silvester or St. Sylvester's Day.

Challenge

Begin saving a little money each week so that by the time Lent begins, you will have enough to buy something such as food for your local shelter.



In Christ, I Can ...

How would I react if the heavenly host suddenly appeared outside my window in the middle of the night? Things that happen suddenly are exciting because... Things that happen suddenly are scary because...



For All the Saints

- How does it feel to know a new baby is coming into a family? What questions should we ask about the event?
- In the Bible, special babies are sometimes given their names through God's special messengers, the angels.
- Who gave John the Baptist his name? (*an angel*)
- Who gave Jesus his name? (*The angel Gabriel*)
- Who knows why they were given the name they have?

January 3

The Most Holy Name of Jesus

In 2002, Pope John Paul II created the feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus and declared its observance to be January 3. For a long time the entire month of January has been designated as the month of the Holy Name, so what better way to begin the month than with the celebration of the feast.

St. Bernardine of Siena (*May 20*) and St. John of Capistrano (*October 23*) were responsible for spreading this devotion throughout Italy as they went about the country preaching. St. Bernardine ended his sermons by displaying a large emblem with the "IHS," representing the name of Jesus.



Gather Together

- Stop your activities a few times during your class to sing a Christmas carol.



Next Sunday's Good News

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?"



Matthew 2:1-2

Think about ...

The magi came from the east just like the sun that comes up every day at dawn.



Week of April 4-10

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb.

Firm Up the Foundation

Mark's Easter Gospel (16:1-7) tells us that Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome came to Jesus' tomb bringing spices to anoint his body. (Remember the magi's gift of myrrh?)



On the feast of Epiphany we looked at the symbolism of each of the magi's gifts, referring to the myrrh as a foreshadowing of Jesus' death.

Spread Sunday's News

In Sunday's **First Reading** from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power."



Anointing a body for burial was standard practice for the Jews. It was the desire to fulfill this ritual that brought Mary and the other women to the tomb on Easter morning. It was then that they discovered Jesus had risen from the dead.

Symbolically this anointing serves as a reference to the ritual anointing of a king at his coronation. Anointing Jesus is one more sign of his role as King of Heaven and Earth.

Just Wondering ...



Without the fact that all living things must die, we would have no need of resurrection. But Jesus' Resurrection is more than simply breathing or having our hearts beat again. It is eternal life in the Kingdom.

Back in November we set aside time to remember and pray for members of our families who have gone before us and are asleep in Christ. The fact that we will be with them again someday is one of the things that hope in the resurrection is all about.

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 the Gospel
from the Easter Vigil

Mark 16:1-2



You should know...

Pope St. Victor I, pope 189-199

A discrepancy exists between the Church of Rome and various Eastern Churches concerning when Easter should be celebrated. The western (Roman) Church traditionally celebrates Easter only on a Sunday.

However, in some Eastern Churches it is customary to celebrate Easter on the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan no matter what day of the week it falls on. They believe this tradition came from the apostles.

It was extremely important to Victor to solve this dilemma, but even after much debate with both sides it was not settled. So **Victor proclaimed that the entire Church must celebrate Easter on a Sunday** and he excommunicated those who would not comply with his wishes.

Today, the Eastern and Western Churches still maintain their own separate traditions.

Challenge

Quietly do something special for a friend, family member, or anyone every day this week, the 8-day Octave of Easter.



In Christ, I Can ...

Jesus suffered and died for me. To show how much I appreciate what he did, I am going to...



Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy

Sunday of Divine Mercy

In May 2005, the Second Sunday of Easter was officially given the secondary designation of Divine Mercy Sunday by Pope John Paul II. He had a deep personal devotion for Sister Faustina, the Polish nun to whom Jesus made known his desire to have the world celebrate this day. The following is from the decree that made this a reality:

“In our times, the Christian faithful in many parts of the world wish to praise that divine mercy in divine worship, particularly in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, in which God’s loving kindness especially shines forth. Acceding to these wishes, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II has graciously determined that in the Roman Missal, after the title ‘Second Sunday of Easter,’ there shall henceforth be added the appellation ‘(or Divine Mercy Sunday),’ and has prescribed that the texts assigned for that day in the same Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours of the Roman Rite are always to be used for the liturgical celebration of this Sunday.”

Gather Together



- Invite children to think about their Lenten promises and how well they accomplished what they set out to do.
- Give each child a white cross to decorate on one side with Easter things, maybe the word *Alleluia*.
- Tell them to write a promise or goal for the 50 days of Easter on the back of the cross.
- After all have finished, go to the **Prayer Zone**.
- Have each child come forward with his or her cross to pin or tape to a bulletin board, poster paper or a large piece of cardboard.
- **Let them hang there until Pentecost.**

Next Sunday’s Good News



Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31

Think about ...

Why do I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through belief in him I may have life in his name?



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Week of June 6-12

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Then [Jesus] took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to [the disciples], and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many."
Mark 14:23-24

Firm Up the Foundation

Following the March Equinox immediately after Passover and before the Feast of Pentecost, is a great biblical feast—the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Leviticus 23:6-8; Exodus 12:17-18*).



The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a feast that is generally mistaken for Passover. Passover however is only one 24-hour period while the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasts for seven days.

Spread Sunday's News

Hopefully students recognize Sunday's **Gospel** passage as part of the Passion read this year on Palm Sunday.

The scene is the Last Supper on the feast of Passover. The image of Jesus calling his blood the new covenant must be understood in the context of the first Passover, when the blood of a lamb marked the doors of the houses of the Israelites, a sign for the angel of death to pass them by.



Covenants in Old Testament times were oral agreements between two parties. The agreement, though not written, was nevertheless "sealed" with a binding ritual that often involved the blood of a sacrificial animal. Such a ritual is recounted in Sunday's **First Reading** from Exodus 24.

Blood represents life. Moses took blood gathered from the sacrifices and holocausts offered as peace offerings and sprinkled it on the altar—representing God—and on the people to seal the covenant.

Just Wondering ...

During the Mass, when the priest is repeating the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, what does he say about the Body and Blood? (*This is my body given up for you. This is my blood poured out for you...*)



Jesus' blood, spilled for us, is the NEW covenant, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament covenants.

Believe it or not, the earliest written record of these important words of Jesus did NOT come from the Gospels, but from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 11:23-26, which was written before the Gospels.

Sunday's Readings

Exodus 24:3-8
Psalm 116

Hebrews 9:11-15
Mark 14:12-16, 22-26



You should know...

**The Institution of the Eucharist belongs to which Mysteries of the Rosary?
What pope introduced these Mysteries?**

The Institution of the Eucharist belongs to the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, introduced by Pope John Paul II.

Challenge

The New Testament tells us how friends St. Barnabas (*feast June 11*) and St. Peter traveled and preached together. They may have argued and separated for a while but later made up. Call a friend you haven't seen for a while.



In Christ, I Can ...

In the Old Testament, God promised to be our God, and asked that we be his people.

What will I promise God today?



For All the Saints

Saturday, June 11

St. Barnabas, first century



Though not one of the original twelve apostles, Barnabas is named as an apostle because of the missionary work he accomplished alone and with Paul. Barnabas was a Jew, a Levite, who had gone to school with Paul. Even after his conversion, Paul was feared by the Jewish Christians because he had been such a zealous persecutor of the newly formed community. It was through Barnabas' intervention that Paul was eventually accepted and trusted.

Barnabas and Paul were frequent traveling and teaching companions, especially in areas where the Gentiles were showing an interest in Christianity. In fact, Barnabas spent much of his time in Antioch, and it was in Antioch that this newly formed religious sect of Jesus' followers were first called Christians.

A dispute did develop between Barnabas and Paul over Paul's reluctance to allow Barnabas' cousin (or perhaps nephew), John Mark (the author of the Gospel) to accompany them. Eventually the dispute was settled.

The most valuable resource for information about Barnabas is found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

Gather Together



- Instead of gathering in the **Prayer Zone**, 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.

How can I make a return to the LORD for all the good God has done for me? The cup of salvation I will take up, and I will call upon the name of the LORD. Amen. —Psalm 116

Next Sunday's Good News



[Jesus] said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God ...? It is like a mustard seed that ... is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants ..."

Mark 4:30a, 31-32

Think about ...

How is the kingdom growing in you?