



Community of Christ

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

YOUTH

27 NOVEMBER 2016 – 1 JANUARY 2017

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS



Lifelong Disciple Formation in Community of Christ is the shaping of persons in the likeness of Christ at all stages of life. It begins with our response to the grace of God in loving community and continues as we help others learn, grow, and serve in the mission of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, discipleship is expressed as one lives the mission initiatives of the church through service, generosity, witness, and invitation.

We invite you to use these lessons for your class, group or congregation.

Lectionary-based: The weekly lessons connect the *Revised Common Lectionary* for worship with Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Quick, easy: The lessons are designed for approximately 45-minute class sessions with two to three pages of ideas, discussion starters, and activities. Additional preparation help may be found in *Sermon and Class Helps, Year A: New Testament* (with focus on the Gospel according to Matthew).

Lessons are available for these age groups:

Children (multiage, 6–11): Help children engage in the Bible and introduce mission and beliefs with stories, crafts, and activities.

Youth (ages 12–18): Engage youth in scripture study and provocative questions about identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Adult (ages 19 and older): Deepen faith and understanding with reflective questions, theological understanding, and discussion ideas.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Bible scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Who's Ready?

Before class, gather large shirts, pants, shoes, hats, and other articles of clothing the group could fit over their clothing. Equally divide the clothing in two piles and ask for two volunteers to race against one another to "get ready" for class. The two group members will then, as quickly as possible, put on all the clothing in his or her pile, racing to finish first. Allow all group members an opportunity to play.

As a class, read today's passage about being ready.

³⁶"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

—Matthew 24:36–44 NRSV

Today is the first week of Advent and the theme is Hope. As we move into the season of Advent, we meet the hope that wells up inside us as we anticipate the birth of Christ. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *advenire* (to come) and during Advent, we celebrate the coming of Jesus into our lives and our world.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

In today's passage, Jesus is helping us prepare by telling us to be alert for the coming of the Son of Man. With television shows and books such as *Left Behind* (a popular book series that fictionalizes the aftereffects of the disappearance of much of the human race), popular culture has labeled those "left behind" as the ones who did something wrong and were rejected from entering the kingdom. However, Community of Christ, with many Christians, understands God's shalom in a loving, grace-filled manner. Community of Christ affirms God's love for all creation and God's desire to restore creation to wholeness. Disciples are called to be an active part of restoration and wholeness. Such an understanding changes our perspective from living in fear of destruction and rejection to being prepared to create a hope-filled future.

LESSON 1
27 November 2016

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (HOPE)

Focus Scripture Passage
Matthew 24:36–44

Lesson Focus: We are hopeful in our preparation for Christ's birth.

Objectives

The learners will...

- begin to prepare for Jesus' birth.
- explore God's shalom.
- create messages about Christ's mission.

Supplies

- Bible (NRSV recommended)
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Assortment of large-size clothing
- Paper
- Markers
- Colored pencils

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 24:36–44 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 18, available through Herald House.

Community of Christ uses the *Revised Common Lectionary* which focuses on a different set of scripture passages each year of the three-year cycle. Last year (Year C) emphasized the Gospel of Luke; this year (Year A) focuses on Matthew.

- In what ways can we be a part of a hope-filled future?
- What does it look like to live in fear as opposed to living in hope?
- What do you want the future to look like? How can you make that happen?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Billboard for God

God sent Jesus to show us the way, to teach us what it means to love and live as disciples. Imagine driving down the road and seeing a billboard with a message that represents our understanding of what mission is about. What might that billboard say? Provide supplies such as paper, markers, and colored pencils for group members to create billboards with their messages. When they have finished, have them share their billboards with the group and display them around the room or church building.

- How can we be billboards for God?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

When the passage says we need to be watchful and ready, it's not because something bad is going to happen to us if we haven't been paying attention. Rather, it reminds us to be prepared, to be part of God's purposes at work in the world. We are called to be aware of our surroundings and open to what is going on so we can be intentional in our lives as disciples.

- In what ways can you be more aware of people and circumstances around you?
- What opportunities for Christ's mission do we miss when we are not prepared to act as compassionate disciples?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Close with the first verse of the Advent hymn "View the Present through the Promise" CCS 401 as a statement of blessing or with a prayer centered on the hope that comes with the birth of Jesus Christ.



Going Deeper: God's Shalom



The Going Deeper section in each lesson has questions or object lessons that can be used to explore further and go deeper into the passage and lesson topics. Use this section with older youth or youth who have discussed the topic previously.

Read the section below on the Enduring Principle of Pursuit of Peace (Shalom) from *Sharing in Community of Christ, 3rd Edition*, p. 13.

Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)

- God wants shalom (justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness, and peace) for all of creation.
- Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom (peace), reveals the meaning of God's peace in all aspects of life.
- The vision of Zion is to promote God's reign on earth, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, through the leavening influence of just and peaceful communities.
- We courageously and generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.
- Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore peace (shalom) to creation.
- We celebrate God's peace wherever it appears or is being pursued by people of good will.

Our understanding of shalom is not God destroying Earth because God is angry or vengeful. Our hope lies in building Zion (communities of justice and peace) here on Earth as we live God's shalom. Using the information about shalom, discuss the pursuit of peace in group members' lives.

- What stands in our way of living God's shalom?
- How must we change what we believe or what we do to create Zion on Earth?
- Consider and then share what shalom is like in your life. What changes in your life would help you live God's shalom more fully?

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Prepare the Way

Provide magazines and newspapers for the group to look through. What draws your attention in the magazines and newspapers? How do advertisers in today's world draw someone's attention and get a message through to them? On a large writing surface, create a list of things, topics, or events that compete for our attention.

What gets most of your attention? Why?

Last week we entered Advent with a lesson about being ready for the coming of Jesus Christ. Today's lesson is about preparing for God's vision of creation. The scripture passage tells us about John the Baptist, who prepares us for Christ's coming.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Act It Out

Read today's passage as a class two times, first so the group knows the story and then a second time while group members act out the scene. If supplies are available, provide costumes for the actors.

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" ⁴Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

—Matthew 3:1–12 NRSV

LESSON 2
4 December 2016

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (JOY)

Focus Scripture Passage
Matthew 3:1–12

Lesson Focus: We are part of God's vision for creation.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the scripture passage by acting it.
- discover what it means to repent.
- think about ways they are like the people in the passage.

Supplies

- Bible (NRSV recommended)
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Large writing surface
- Marker
- Magazines and newspapers
- Optional: costumes

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 3:1–12 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 20, available through Herald House.

In today's passage, John the Baptist comes to us to help us prepare for the coming of Christ. John tells us that we need to repent and be baptized!

- How would John, or anyone, get this message across to people today?
- What do you do to prepare the way for Christ in your life? In your community?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

In Your Life

There are times in our lives we are like the different people in today's passage. John the Baptist is calling for repentance and a new way of being. The Pharisees and Sadducees are reluctant to change their understanding. The people coming to be baptized are seeking a new life.

- Describe a time in your life when you, like John the Baptist, have called others to change their ways.
- Describe a time in your life when you have been more like the Pharisees and Sadducees, reluctant to change your thoughts or actions.
- Describe a time in your life when you were more like the people coming to be baptized, hoping for a new life.

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Joy

This week's Advent theme is Joy. With Jesus' birth, joy comes into the world and our lives. During Advent, we are called to prepare ourselves, our congregations, and our communities for Christ. Invite the group to think about their plans for the coming week.

- How can they bring joy to each of these activities and share what they've learned today?
- How can they give their attention to what matters most this week?
- In what ways can they bring joy to themselves and others by preparing the way for Christ?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

In closing sing "Lord, Prepare Me" CCS 280 or "On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry" CCS 391.

Going Deeper: Repentance

Advent is a time of preparation and today's passage continues that preparation with the call to baptism. While in the wilderness, John offers baptism to those who had followed him. When the Sadducees and Pharisees come, John tells them that baptism is not enough; they must "bear fruit worthy of repentance." Although we are baptized once, repentance and the covenant we make through baptism are continuing commitments in our lives.

In Greek, "repent" means "a change of heart or mind." Repentance is more than simply regretting or feeling sorry for doing wrong and promising you won't do it again. It means you've adopted a new way of thinking and being, that your understanding of life and connection with people guide new behaviors.

- What does repentance involve?
- Why do we need repentance in our lives?
- In what ways does repenting prepare the way for Christ in our lives?
- How does repentance prepare for God's vision of shalom?
- What new way of being is possible for you this Advent season?

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Prior to class, identify a member of the congregation who is not part of your class. Give him or her a slip of paper with today's scripture passage written on it. When the youth ask, "Are you the one who is to come?" he or she should then give the youth the slip of paper to take back to class. (If this person is attending another class, make sure the other class is aware there will be a disruption at the beginning of the lesson.)

Are You the One?

When students are gathered at the beginning of class, tell them they need to find a specific person in the building. Group members must go around asking, "Are you the one who is to come?" until they find the right person who will give them a slip of paper with today's scripture passage written on it. Once they have the scripture passage, students should return to class.

In last week's scripture passage John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus Christ, the Messiah; yet in today's passage we read about John's doubt. While imprisoned, John hears about Jesus' deeds and has doubts that he is the Messiah. Read Jesus' response to John in today's passage. Take turns by having each group member read a verse.

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ⁴Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' ¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

—Matthew 11:2–11 NRSV

Like John, we have moments of doubt in our lives as disciples. Jesus responds by telling us to hear and see all the good in the world.

LESSON 3
11 December 2016

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (PEACE)

Focus Scripture Passage
Matthew 11:2–11

Lesson Focus: As we wait for Jesus, we remain faithful.

Objectives

The learners will...

- recognize John the Baptist as the one sent to prepare us for the Messiah.
- explore what it means to be faithful.
- share the message of the coming Messiah as John the Baptist did.

Supplies

- Bible (NRSV recommended)
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Slips of paper
- Pens, pencils, or markers
- Paper doves

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 11:2–11 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 22, available through Herald House.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Awaiting Expectations

Jesus did not meet the expectations of everyone who waited for the Messiah. Many at the time, including John, had expectations of how a person in power would respond to the harsh conditions of the Jewish people. Jesus' acts as Messiah did not bring those results. Many questions and doubts were raised. When John puts those doubts to Jesus, Jesus answers that his acts are of compassion and love. These actions were prophesied by Isaiah and contrast with last week's scripture passage, which led to John's doubt. Jesus tells John to look at what he's done—to look at his actions to know that he is the Messiah.

- How does Jesus surprise you with his presence and influence in your life?
- Where do you see evidence of love in the world?
- How have others shown their love to you?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Share the Good News

Because John was in jail, Jesus' and John's communications had to be sent through the disciples. The telephone game works in a similar way. Have one person think of a message (usually only a sentence) to share. He or she then whispers the message in the ear of the person on the left, and that person whispers the message in the person's ear on his or her left. Continue until the message reaches the final recipient who says the message aloud. Play a few rounds of telephone allowing different group members to be the originator or the final recipient in each round.

John asks if Jesus is the one they have been waiting for. Jesus responds by telling him to listen to the stories he's heard and see the love and compassion that comes from Jesus' ministry. By Jesus showing that his mission will be one of love and compassion, he is sharing that mission with all of us. One of the Community of Christ Mission Initiatives is Invite People to Christ, which is Christ's mission of evangelism. We are challenged to help others understand Christ's peace through compassion, justice, and peacemaking. Sometimes all it takes is an invitation or a listening ear to share the good news of Jesus' love and compassion for others.

- With whom are we invited to share Christ's love, compassion, peacemaking, and justice?
- John was waiting for the Messiah to change the world. Who is waiting for you to change their world?



Going Deeper: Remaining Faithful

Although John doubted that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus continued to speak well of John. In the second half of today's passage, Jesus expresses how important John was in preparing the way for the Messiah. He did so without losing faith and without conforming to those around him. John remained true to who he was and his faith in the coming Messiah. We can use stories and lessons from scripture as a guide for how to move forward after moments of struggle or doubt in our lives. Even after being imprisoned and doubting Jesus, John remained faithful, and Jesus spoke well of him.

- Share about a time you doubted in your life as a disciple.
- How did you remain faithful?
- Who helped you remain faithful? Explain.

4 SEND

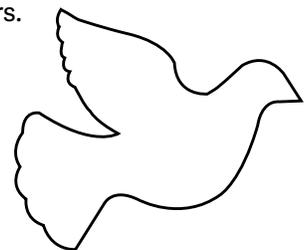
Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Peace

Today's Advent theme is Peace. A symbol often used to represent peace is a dove. Have a blank paper dove for each group member, and invite them to think of ways they can bring the peace of Jesus Christ into their interactions with others this week. Then encourage the group to fill in the blanks of the statement below and write it on their doves.

I will engage in Christ's mission of _____ by _____.

They can keep the doves with them throughout the week as a reminder that we should always strive in our lives as disciples to share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.



5

BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,
blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

In closing sing "Lord, Make Us Instruments" CCS 364 or ask one of the group members to pray that the group and others feel the peace of Jesus Christ this week.

DOVE PATTERN



I will engage in Christ's mission of

by _____.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today's scripture passage is a story found only in Matthew. Since Matthew is the only Gospel in which this part of Joseph's story appears, this is a unique opportunity to learn from Joseph. Read today's passage as a group.

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

—Matthew 1:18–25 NRSV

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Love Story

Love stories are popular in movies, books, and TV shows. Today's scripture passage and Advent theme (Love) fit well in the love story category. In today's passage, Joseph shows us what it means to love by showing us that love is about being kind and understanding, having respect for others, and being in a compassionate relationship. The story of Mary and Joseph isn't just a love story; it's a story that teaches us how to live as disciples.

- Share your favorite love story. Where in this story are examples of kindness, understanding, respect, and compassion?
- What can we learn from Mary and Joseph about love?
- What are qualities of unconditional love? (write answers on a large writing surface)

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Compassion Scenarios

Imagine a circumstance like the one in today's passage about Mary and Joseph. How would you respond if you thought

LESSON 4
18 December 2016

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (LOVE)

Focus Scripture Passage
Matthew 1:18–25

Lesson Focus: Christ is born anew with our compassionate acts as disciples.

Objectives

The learners will...

- read about Joseph's love, compassion, and understanding.
- engage in compassion scenarios.
- go deeper in understanding the meaning of salvation.

Supplies

- Bible (NRSV recommended)
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Large writing surface
- Markers

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 1:18–25 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 24, available through Herald House.

someone you loved and trusted betrayed you? Could you respond with compassion like Joseph? It was within Joseph's rights to end his engagement with Mary and to do so publicly. Mary would have been rejected by the community or possibly put to death. Joseph chose to respond differently. Even before the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, Joseph had chosen compassion over retribution.

Arrange the group in pairs or small groups, and have each group come up with a scenario that shows the compassion Joseph showed Mary. Have groups act out their scenarios for the whole group.

- Think of a time when you showed compassion to someone else, or when someone showed compassion to you.
- Why is it difficult to be compassionate?
- How does compassion like Joseph's change our lives and the lives of others?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived

(10% of total lesson time)

Qualities of Love

Remind the group of the list of qualities of unconditional love they made. Have each group member choose a word or two from the list that stands out to them. In small groups of two or three have them share how they will embody that word this week. Jesus' birth, which brings joy, hope, love, and peace can be experienced anew through our Joseph-like acts of love and compassion.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

(5% of total lesson time)

Sing "Joseph, Kind Joseph" CCS 414 as a closing prayer or commitment statement, or invite a group member to offer a prayer of blessing for the group.

Going Deeper: Salvation

Have you ever seen a sign that says "Jesus saves" or been asked, "Have you been saved?" What does it mean to be saved? This question is about salvation, but what is salvation? Read the paragraph on salvation in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* and discuss the follow questions.

The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sin, and healing from separation, brokenness, and the power of violence and death. This healing is for individuals, human societies, and all of creation. This new life is the loving gift of God's grace that becomes ours through faith and repentance. Baptism is how we first express our commitment to lifelong discipleship. As we yield our lives to Christ in baptism we enter Christian community (the body of Christ) and have the promise of salvation. We experience salvation through Jesus Christ, but affirm that God's grace has no bounds, and God's love is greater than we can know (p. 15).

Salvation is not a reward we get at the end of our lives; salvation is a complete way of life. "Salvation from a Community of Christ perspective is finally about the complete yielding of our lives to the One who 'is our peace'" (Tony Chvala-Smith, "Jesus Saves," *Herald*, January 2005). Today's passage is an example of relational salvation.

- How would you describe salvation?
- How do Joseph's actions in today's passage promote relational salvation?
- How do you, your community, or your congregation promote relational salvation?

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Upside-Down Kingdom

Before class, create an upside-down Christmas tree in the room. It can be a large tree hung on the wall or a small tree placed in the center of a table. Use whatever supplies are available. As group members gather, let them wonder about the tree. Wait to address why it's upside-down until after the group has read today's scripture passage.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

—Luke 2:1–20 NRSV

The circumstances of Jesus' birth say a lot about what the kingdom God envisages for us. Jesus is a king, but a king born in a lowly stable, representing those who are oppressed and marginalized. He is the prophesied Messiah, and he came to show us how to make God's kingdom a reality, but his life is not that of a typical king. The upside-down tree represents how Jesus is not like other kings, and the kingdom he reveals is not a kingdom like other kingdoms. It is an upside-down kingdom—"the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16).

LESSON 5
25 December 2016

CHRISTMAS DAY

Focus Scripture Passage

Luke 2:1–20

Lesson Focus: Christ's birth brings joy, hope, love, and peace to our world.

Objectives

The learners will...

- read about the upside-down kingdom that comes with Jesus' birth.
- go deeper into the story of Jesus' birth.
- share the joy, hope, love, and peace of the Christmas season.

Supplies

- Bible (NRSV recommended)
- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Christmas tree
- Empty, clear ornaments
- Glitter, small funnel
- Puff paint

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Luke 2:1–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 25, available through Herald House.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Compare the story

Compare the story of Jesus' birth in Luke (Luke 2:1-20) and Matthew (Matthew 1:18-25), and then discuss the questions below noting likenesses and differences.

- What about this story seems upside-down?
- What would you expect with the birth of a king? How does this contrast with Jesus' birth? (lowly birth, unwed teenage mother, born in a stable)
- How do the circumstances of Jesus' birth connect with his life and mission?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)



Ornaments of Joy, Hope, Love, and Peace

Today is Christmas, a day we celebrate Christ's birth. Create ornaments to hang on the tree to remind us of the feelings of joy, hope, love, and peace we experience during the season of Christmas. Using empty plastic ornaments (can be purchased at a craft store), provide puff paint and glitter for group members to create their ornaments. Different colors of glitter can be put inside the ornaments using a funnel, and the puff paint can be used to write the words, "joy," "hope," "love," and "peace" on the outside of the ornament. If these supplies are not available, ornaments can be made from paper and decorated with markers or paint. Discuss with the group their Advent journey as they create their ornaments.

- How has Advent changed your life as a disciple?
- What was an important discovery during Advent?
- How has Advent prepared you for Christmas?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Jesus's birth was a symbol of God's love for the entire world. Ask the group, "How will you make God's love visible?" Challenge them to live those responses during the week.



Going Deeper: Incarnation

"By the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus, born of Mary, came into the world to live and dwell among us to reveal God's nature and will" (*Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*). The incarnation shapes the story of Mary and Joseph on their faith journeys and sets the stage for Christ's place in the world. Some people struggle with incarnation and question what that means for Jesus and their faith.

- What is the most important part of Jesus' birth story? Why?
- If the circumstances of Jesus' birth were different, would it change the mission and message of Jesus' life and ministry? Explain.
- How does the Jesus you know change if any part of the story is changed?

It's all right to wonder about the circumstances of Jesus' birth. Science and reason make it difficult for us to have faith that something like this is possible. Regardless of the circumstances of Jesus' birth, Jesus is the Messiah and came to Earth to show us how to make God's vision of shalom a reality. Today we celebrate Jesus' birth and the joy, hope, love, and peace Christ brings to our lives.

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Sing "Leftover People in Leftover Places" CCS 275 to remember those we forget or leave behind, those whom Christ upholds as worthy and loved. Then, encourage group members to write or offer a prayer for someone in their lives represented by the upside-down kingdom.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Read Matthew 2:13–18. Review the events that led to this time. Describe Joseph's dream. Give each group member a sheet of card stock to sketch Joseph's dream. What were the conditions at home? Where were Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to go? What prophecy was fulfilled by this action? Who was the prophet giving the prophecy?

¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

Read Matthew 2:19–21. Ask group members to describe what happened next. Give each group member another sheet of card stock and sketch scene two. Who appeared? What was their destination?

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

Read Matthew 2:22–23. Provide a third sheet of card stock to sketch scene three. Who was king and what was his relationship to Herod? How was Joseph warned? Where were they told to go? What prophecy was fulfilled this time? What acts of faith can be identified in the story?

²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."

In ancient times, triptychs were writing tablets composed of three panels of writing, pictures, designs, or carvings hinged or tied together. They were used mainly as altarpieces. Make triptychs by connecting each of the three sheets sketched by class members. Use tape or punch holes and join the three sheets with string. Stand the triptychs up, adjusting outside panels forward slightly until they stand by themselves. Display the triptychs throughout your place of worship.

LESSON 6
1 January 2017

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY

Focus Scripture Passage
Matthew 2:13–23

Lesson Focus: The faithful listen and respond to God's call.

Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the scripture passage.
- be reminded of a king born for everyone.
- engage in stories about the faithful

Supplies

- Bible (NRSV recommended)
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Card stock (three sheets per person)
- String or yarn, hole punch or tape
- Crayons or colored pencils
- Nativity scene

Note to teacher: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 2:13–23 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 26, available through Herald House.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Faithful Journey

Today's scripture passage includes the tragic story of King Herod killing all male infants in Bethlehem. This fate for Jesus was avoided by the faithful response of Joseph. After Joseph's dream, his response was to listen and move Jesus and Mary to safety. Because Joseph had faith and listened to God's call, Jesus was safe.

- Joseph was on a faithful journey. What has been an unexpected experience on your faithful journey? Explain.
- In what ways is it difficult to be faithful? In what ways is it easy?
- How do you listen for God's direction in your life?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Listen to God's Voice

Arrange the group in pairs. Take turns having each pair try to converse while the rest of the group talks loudly around them. The pairs should find it difficult to hear each other over the loud talking and distracting voices of those around them.

It can be difficult to listen for God when there are many things going on that distract us. Just like trying to converse while other people are talking over you, if we are too distracted by what's going on in our lives, then we will miss what God is trying to say to us. There are many "voices" in our lives that compete for our attention, but it is God who wishes to be with us, dwell with us, and lead us. All are called to share gifts, invite others to Christ, and to do good in the world.

- What does it mean to listen for God's voice?
- Have there been times in your life when you listened for God's voice and responded? What was the result?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Challenge Question

Today is the beginning of a new year, the chance to listen for God's voice calling to you. In the pairs formed above, have group members share their answers to the challenge question.

- At the beginning of this year, what actions will you take to be a faithful participant in the sacred story?



Going Deeper: The Wise Men

Out of Place

Place a nativity scene (one that includes the wise men) on a table or somewhere the group can see it. Now that the group has read today's scripture passage, ask them what is out of place with the scene. The wise men, Magi, or three kings as they are sometimes called, only appear in the Gospel of Matthew. While they are often depicted in nativity scenes when Jesus was born, they did not arrive until later. The wise men were from the East, foreigners to Jesus, and yet they recognized Jesus as the king. It fits that these visitors to Jesus, a king for all, were outsiders.

- How would you describe the wise men in today's passage?
- Who are the "wise men" today?
- Whom do the "wise men" represent in your community?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

In closing read Doctrine and Covenants 162:2a or invite a group member to offer a prayer of blessing.

- 2a. Listen carefully to your own journey as a people, for it is a sacred journey and it has taught you many things you must know for the journey yet to come.