The Joy of Advent: Week 2, Middle and Upper Elementary

Learning Goals

- Advent is a time for waiting and for preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ, not only as a baby at Christmas, but also at the end of time in His promised Second Coming.
- The Nativity Scene is one of the most well-known symbols of Advent and Christmas.
- St. Francis of Assisi created the first Nativity Scene.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

- CCC 522-525

Vocabulary

- Nativity Scene

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

“Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A Voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”

MARK 1:2–3

And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

LUKE 2:13–14
Lesson Plan

Materials

- Teacher Resource: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
- Handout A: Teaching the Liturgical Year: Second Week of Advent
- Handout B: Nativity and Annunciation to the Shepherds
- Handout C: Create Your Own Nativity Scene
- Crayons, markers, and/or colored pencils

Warm Up

A. Using Teacher Resource: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, project the lyrics to the hymn and teach your students the song. Then lead your students in singing the song together.

B. Distribute to your students Handout A: Teaching the Liturgical Year: Second Week of Advent. Have students read the Gospel passage, or read it aloud to your students, and then answer the focus questions. You may have students answer them on their own or you may discuss them together as a class.

C. When they have finished, review the correct answers to the focus questions.

D. Activity extension: If you have set up an Advent wreath and candles in your class, have a lighting ceremony of the first and second candles before reading the Gospel for this week.

Activity

A. Review with your students the signs and symbols of Advent they have learned about (the Advent wreath and candles, the Jesse Tree, and the Advent calendar). Review how these signs, symbols, and traditions help us reflect on and prepare for the coming of Christ. Then explain that one of the most well-known symbols of Advent and Christmas is the Nativity Scene.

B. Distribute copies of Handout B: Nativity and Annunciation to the Shepherds by Bernardino Luini.
Luini and/or project an image of the painting. Give your students a few moments to observe the painting, then ask the following questions:

- What stands out to you about this painting? Accept reasoned answers.
- What is happening in the painting? It is a painting of the Nativity of Jesus, or Jesus’ birth. In the background we see the angels announcing Jesus’ birth to the shepherds in the field.
- Who are the figures in the painting? Mary is in the front and center of the painting, with St. Joseph to her left (in yellow). To Mary’s right is the baby Jesus, surrounded by four angels, two on the ground with Him, and two above Him, looking down upon Him. There are also various animals from the stable present in the painting.
- What do you see surrounding the heads of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and the angels? What do you think this means? Halos, which signify the holiness of the person.
- Look at the angel immediately to Mary’s right. What is he holding, and what does it look as if he is doing with it? What do you think this might mean? The angel is holding a small Cross. It looks as if he is giving the Cross to Jesus, who is reaching out to take it. This foreshadows how Jesus would later take up and carry the Cross and give His life on the Cross for our sins. In fact, this is one of the important reasons that God sent His Son to earth, to save us from sin.
- Read aloud to your students Luke 2:1-14 (the story of the birth of Jesus and the annunciation of His birth to the shepherds). Then ask your students how this painting illustrates this Gospel story. Would your students change anything or add something to the painting to illustrate the story better? Accept reasoned answers.

C. Explain the following to your students:

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first Nativity Scene in 1223. On Christmas Eve, St. Francis invited his brother friars and the townspeople to a cave in Grecco, Italy. There he set up an empty manger, or a feeding trough for animals, surrounded by hay. He even brought in a live ox and a donkey! That night, in the cave, a Mass was celebrated with these symbols of Christ’s birth serving as a reminder of the poverty and humbleness of the way Christ came into the world. To this day, it is a tradition of the Franciscan religious order to have a Nativity Scene set up year-round as a constant reminder of Christ’s coming and of His poverty and humility. During Advent, the Nativity Scene is a visual way for us to contemplate the events of Christ’s birth and the coming of our Savior. It is traditional to leave the manger empty until Christmas Eve and then place a statue or representation of the Baby Jesus in the manger on the day of His birth.

Formative Assessment

A. Distribute to your students Handout C: Create Your Own Nativity Scene and make crayons, markers, and/or colored pencils available. Have your students color and cut out the various parts
and assemble them into their own Nativity Scene (they can either tape or glue the pieces to the crèche). Remind your students to leave the manger empty until Christmas. Then, on Christmas, when we celebrate Jesus’ birth, they can add the cutout of the Baby Jesus. Encourage students to take their Nativity Scenes home to display them throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons (or year-round, as in the Franciscan tradition), or display them in your classroom.

B. Conclude by singing again “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” as a class.
Handout A: Teaching the Liturgical Year: Second Week of Advent

1. John was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. He wanted to portray simplicity and humility. The Jewish people were expecting Elijah to return before the coming of the Messiah. John knows he is the new Elijah, and so he purposely dresses and acts the way Elijah did to communicate to the people that he is the forerunner of the coming Messiah.

2. The desert. He chooses this setting to symbolize the need to retreat and escape our busy lives to come face-to-face with our sinfulness and repent of it. The setting represents simplicity and the desire to live a life of self-denial. Accept additional reasoned answers.

3. To prepare the way for Christ, to call people to repentance and model humility.

4. To fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah. God sends John the Baptist to more fully soften the people’s hearts and ready them to receive His Son. God has already been doing this throughout Salvation History with the other prophets. John the Baptist is given the task of being the final prophet and the bridge between the Old and New Covenants.

5. This passage is all about John the Baptist preparing the people for the one who is coming after him: Jesus. Advent is a time for us to prepare for Christmas. This passage helps us to reflect on what is necessary for us to welcome Christ into our hearts and homes at Christmas: repentance, reconciliation, and the humility to seek those dispositions. Accept additional reasoned answers.
O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go. (Refrain.)

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe. (Refrain.)

O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave. (Refrain.)

O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode. (Refrain.)

O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light. (Refrain.)

O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace. (Refrain.)