The JOY of ADVENT
Teaching the Liturgical Year

FOUR LESSONS FOR ADVENT 2019

December 1, 2019
First Sunday of Advent

December 8, 2019
Second Sunday of Advent

December 15, 2019
Third Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2019
Fourth Sunday of Advent
The JOY of Advent
Teaching the Liturgical Year

Lessons for Lower 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.
- God prepared His people from the very beginning for Christ’s coming and for salvation.
- The Advent wreath and candles, the Jesse Tree, and Advent calendars are symbols of the Advent season.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

- CCC 522-525

Vocabulary

- Advent
- Advent Wreath
- Advent Calendar
- Jesse Tree
- Messiah

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

ISAIAH 11:1

She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

LUKE 2:7
Lesson Plan

Warm Up

A. Begin by leading your students in the prayer for this lesson.

B. Distribute to your students the Handout A: Teaching the Liturgical Year: First Week of Advent. Read the Gospel passage aloud to your students as they follow along. Then discuss the focus and reflection questions with them as a class.

C. Activity extension: If you have set up an Advent wreath and candles in your class (see the formative assessment for day 2 of this lesson), have a “lighting” ceremony of the first candle before reading the Gospel for this week.

Materials

› Handout A: First Week of Advent
› Handout B: Advent: The Coming of Our Savior
› Handout C: Waiting
› Handout D: Advent Poem
› Handout E: Symbols of Advent
› Handout F: Ornament Template

Prayer

Dear God, we praise you and adore you. Thank you for preparing us, your people, for the coming of your Son. Thank you for sending Jesus to us, to show us your love and to save us from sin. Help us to prepare our hearts to welcome your Son at Christmas. Help us to know the joy that He brings to the world. Amen.

DAY ONE

First Week of Advent:
(Lower Elementary)

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 24:37-44: The Coming of the Son of Man

For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In [those] days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be [also] at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: If the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.
Activity
A. Explain to your students that this Sunday marks the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of the first week of the Advent season. Advent is a liturgical season in the life of the Church. We celebrate Advent in the four weeks that lead up to Christmas Day. 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.

B. Continue to explain that, over the next few weeks, your students will learn more about Advent and the signs and symbols of the season and will do some activities to help them enter more deeply into this time of waiting and preparation.

C. Distribute to your students the worksheet **Handout B: Advent: The Coming of Our Savior**.

D. Read the background essay aloud to your students. Then discuss the focus questions together.

Formative Assessment
A. Distribute to your students the worksheet **Handout C: Waiting**. Then explain to them that we wait for all kinds of things in our lives. We wait in line to check out at the grocery store. We sit in the waiting room when we see a doctor. We wait at stop lights, and we wait for the bus to pick us up. We wait for phone calls from friends and family members. We wait for our birthday to come, and we wait for holidays and days off from school.

B. Then ask your students the following questions:

- What are some other things that we wait for? Accept reasoned answers.
- Is the thing or event we wait for better or worse because we have to wait for it? Accept reasoned answers. Some things we wait for could be worse because we have to wait for them, such as getting a shot at the doctor’s office. Other things are better because we have to wait for them, such as when we anticipate the fun we’ll have at a birthday party.
C. Have your students complete the reflection activity on Handout C: Waiting. You may have your students write about or draw a picture of a time when they had to wait for something good.

D. When finished, consider calling on a few students to share their stories or drawings. You may have them share with the whole class or in groups.

DAY TWO

Warm-Up

Distribute to each student the Handout D: Advent Poem worksheet. Have your students create an acrostic poem using the letters of the word Advent. Each line of the poem should describe some aspect of Advent or Christmas.

Activity

A. Explain to your students that the Advent season is filled with signs, symbols, and traditions to help us reflect on and prepare for the coming of Christ. Distribute to your students Handout E: Symbols of Advent. Have your students read about the symbols of Advent and color the images.

B. When they have finished, review the Advent symbols by asking your students the following:
   
   - Which symbol of Advent is made from evergreen branches formed into a circle? The Advent wreath.
   - On which symbol of Advent are small doors opened to reveal an image of Jesus, a Scripture passage, or a small toy or piece of candy? The Advent calendar.
   - The circular shape of which symbol of Advent represents eternal life? The Advent wreath.
› Which symbol of Advent is decorated with ornaments that represent important events and people from Salvation History? The Jesse Tree.
› The green color of which symbol of Advent represents hope for salvation? The Advent wreath.
› Which symbol of Advent is connected to a prophecy from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah? The Jesse Tree.
› Which symbol of Advent marks each passing day of the season? The Advent calendar.
› Which symbol of Advent is decorated with four candles, each representing one of the weeks of Advent? The Advent wreath.
› Which symbol of Advent borrows the idea of a decoration for winter holidays that predates Christianity? The Jesse Tree.
› What do the purple candles of the Advent wreath represent? Sorrow for sins, or repentance.
› What does the pink candle of the Advent wreath represent? Rejoicing because our Savior is coming soon.

C. As an alternate lesson suggestion, arrange your students in groups of three or four. Assign each group one of the symbols of Advent. Have them read about their assigned symbol and color the image. Then have each group give a short presentation to the class about their symbol.

Formative Assessment
Consider doing one or all of the following during this Advent season:
› Set up a Christmas tree in your classroom as a Jesse Tree and have your students decorate it with ornaments representing events or people from Salvation History that prepared for the coming of Jesus. Distribute Handout F: Ornament Template and have your students creatively illustrate different events. You may choose a day each week of Advent to have your students create and hang new ornaments on the tree, or spend one lesson at the beginning of Advent having them create and hang new ornaments. Suggestions for Jesse Tree ornament symbols, including Scripture verses to read, can be found at SophiaOnline.org/
**Jesse Tree.** Consider looking up and reading aloud or retelling the Scripture stories as you add each person or event to your class Jesse Tree.

- Set up an Advent wreath with candles in a prominent place in your classroom. Have a “lighting” ceremony at the beginning of each week of Advent. Consider reading that week’s Gospel reading as part of the lighting ceremony and having a discussion about it using the focus questions from that week’s Teaching the Liturgical Year lesson.

- Create an Advent-calendar bulletin board in your classroom with flaps of paper that you can open each day during Advent. Decorate the calendar with different images of Christmas, Jesus, or images from Salvation History. Each flap could reveal a Scripture passage from the story of Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:1-20), allowing you to read the Christmas story aloud throughout Advent. Or, the flaps could reveal some sort of prizes for your students, or any creative idea that you think is appropriate.
A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 24:37-44: The Coming of the Son of Man

For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In [those] days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be [also] at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.
Focus Questions

1. What does Jesus say the coming of the son of man will be like?

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2. What did the people in Noah’s time not know?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Who will come at an hour we do not expect?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Directions: Read the essay about Advent and then answer the focus questions.

God’s people waited for many years for the Messiah to come. The Messiah is the one who would save us from sin. God prepared His people for the Messiah from the very beginning.

God created Adam and Eve to live with Him in the Garden of Eden. They were made to know and love God as Father and to be loved by Him. But Adam and Eve turned away from God’s love and sinned. Sin and death came into the world. God promised to save them one day from their sin. God promised a Savior!

The Savior did not come right away, however. The human race was badly hurt by sin. So God had to prepare us to be saved. Step by step, God worked in human history. He made Himself and His love known to us.
When the time was right, God sent His only, beloved Son to earth. The second Person of the Holy Trinity assumed a human nature and became man in the Person of Jesus Christ. He was born on Christmas Day in a stable in a small town called Bethlehem. His mother was the Virgin Mary. His earthly foster father was St. Joseph. Jesus taught us how to be holy. He showed us how much the Father loves us. Then He gave His life for us on the Cross and rose from the dead. Our God died for us and defeated death. Our salvation had come!

We celebrate the coming of our Savior at Christmas. We are just like the people who waited for the Messiah. We spend the weeks before Christmas waiting and preparing for His coming. We call this time Advent. Advent is a liturgical season. It is a time to draw close to God and think about all that He
has done for us. It is a time to be thankful for all the blessings He has given us. It is a time to pray. It is a time to follow Jesus’ example. He taught us to serve others, especially those who are sick, suffering, or in need. Advent is a time to make room in our hearts and lives for Christ to come and be with us.

During Advent, we also look forward to Jesus’ Second Coming. Jesus promised that He would come again at the end of time. Then, all things will be made new. If we have lived holy lives by loving God and loving our neighbor, we will be welcomed into eternal life.

Focus Questions

1. Why did God promise to save His people?

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____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Who is the Savior? What are two things He did?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
3. What two things do we wait for during Advent? What are two things we do during Advent?
Waiting

Directions: Draw a picture of a time when you had to wait for something good to happen.
Advent Poem

Directions: Write an acrostic poem using the letters in the word Advent. Each line should describe something about Advent or Christmas.

- __________________________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________________________
Symbols of Advent

Advent Wreath and Candles

The Advent wreath is a way for families to think about Advent in their homes. Catholic churches use an Advent wreath to help celebrate the Advent season.

The wreath is made of a circle of evergreen branches. The circle is a sign of eternal life. The green color of the wreath is a sign of hope. During Advent we hope for salvation from sin. We also hope for eternal life with Jesus in Heaven.

The wreath is decorated with four candles. There is one candle for each week of Advent. We light one new candle every Sunday during Advent. The first two candles and the fourth candle are usually purple. Purple is a color that represents sorrow for sin.

The third candle is pink. This represents our joy because Jesus is coming soon. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent. This Sunday is Gaudete Sunday, or Rejoice Sunday.

The light from all of the lit candles represents Jesus. He is the Light of the World.
Jesse Tree

Jesse was the father of King David. The prophet Isaiah wrote about the family tree of David. He wrote that “a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom” (11:1). Long before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah told us that our Savior would be a relative of King David. He would be the one to save us from sin. He would make all of God’s promises come true.

The Jesse Tree is similar to a Christmas tree, but it is not a Christmas tree. In fact, people decorated a tree for winter even before Jesus was born!

During Advent, a tree is decorated with ornaments that represent the important events and people in Salvation History. These people helped prepare for the coming of Jesus. Every week in Advent new ornaments are added to the tree.
Advent Calendar

An Advent calendar is a way to mark each passing day of the Advent season. The Advent calendar usually has small doors or windows that are opened each day of Advent. Behind each door is a picture of Jesus or a small gift. Sometimes there’s candy, or a Bible story. We open each door, one by one, until Christmas Eve. Then the celebration of Christmas begins!
Answer Key

Handout A: First Week of Advent
1. The days of Noah.
2. They did not know that the flood would come and carry them away.
3. Jesus, the Son of Man.

Handout B: Advent: The Coming of Our Savior
1. Adam and Eve sinned against God by turning away from His love. They needed salvation from sin.
2. Jesus Christ, God’s only beloved Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He assumed a human nature and became man, He was born on Christmas Day in a stable in Bethlehem, His mother is the Virgin Mary, His earthly foster father is St. Joseph, He taught us how to be holy, He showed us the Father’s love for us, He gave His life on the Cross and rose from the dead, and He defeated death.
3. The coming of Jesus at Christmas and at the end of time at His Second Coming. We draw close to God and think about all He has done for us, we give thanks to God for all of His blessings, we pray, we follow Jesus’ example by serving others, we make room in our hearts and lives for Jesus to be with us.
The Joy of Advent: Week 2, Lower 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

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”
MATTHEW 3:3

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: 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. Read the Gospel passage aloud to your students as they follow along. Then discuss the focus and reflection questions with them as a class.

C. 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 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.
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.)
A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 3:1-12: The Preaching of John the Baptist

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves,
'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Focus Questions

1. What was John the Baptist telling people to do?

2. What Old Testament prophet is quoted in this Gospel?

3. Who did John the Baptist call a “brood of vipers?”

4. How will the people be baptized by the one “coming after” John?
HANDOUT B: Teaching the Liturgical Year

Nativity and Annunciation to the Shepherds
BY BERNARDINO LUINI (1525)

Musée du Louvre, Paris
Create Your Own Nativity Scene

Directions:
Color and cut out the parts of the Nativity Scene. Then assemble them into your own Nativity Scene that you can display at home.
Answer Key

Handout A: Second Week of Advent

1. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”
2. Isaiah.
3. The Pharisees and Sadducees.
4. With the Holy Spirit and fire.
The Joy of Advent: Week 3, Lower 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.
› John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah.
› Jesus defied and far surpassed the people’s expectations for the Messiah and what He would do.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

› CCC 522-525
› CCC 711-720
› CCC 1023-1029

Vocabulary

› Heaven
› Gaudete Sunday

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

“Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”
MATTHEW 11:11

Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.
REVELATION 21:3–4
Lesson Plan

Materials

- Handout A: Third Week of Advent
- Handout B: Expectations

Prayer

Dear God, we praise you and adore you. Thank you for preparing us, your people, for the coming of your Son. Thank you for sending Jesus to us, to show us your love and to save us from sin. Help us to prepare our hearts to welcome your Son at Christmas. Help us to know the joy that He brings to the world. Amen.

Teacher’s Note: Before teaching this lesson, precut enough strips of purple and pink construction paper for each student to have three purple strips and one pink strip. Each strip should be approximately 2 or 3 inches wide and 11 inches long.

Warm Up

A. Begin by leading your students in the prayer for this lesson.

B. Distribute to your students Handout A: Teaching the Liturgical Year: Third Week of Advent (page 39). Read the Gospel passage aloud to your students as they follow along. Then discuss the focus and reflection questions with them as a class.

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

Activity

D. Explain to your students that, as they have learned, this third week of Advent is known as Gaudete, or Rejoice, Sunday. For this week, we light the pink candle on the Advent wreath (and the priest at Mass will often wear pink vestments) as a sign of our joy for the coming Messiah, our Savior Jesus Christ, who will soon be born on Christmas Day. Then explain the following to your students:
In this week’s Gospel, it is clear that the people, had their own ideas, about how to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. During his ministry, John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah, for Jesus to come and to save us. And in many ways Jesus was different from what the people expected. Instead of being a rich, powerful earthly king, Jesus was poor and humble and did not rule an earthly kingdom. Instead, He served others, gave His life for us on the Cross, and established the spiritual Kingdom of God here on earth. Jesus was greater than what the people expected the Messiah would be. He exceeded their expectations! The same is true for our expectations of Heaven and the fulfillment of God’s promises to us. We all have ideas about what Heaven might be like, or what we want Heaven to be like, but the reality is far greater! What God has in store for us in the Kingdom of Heaven goes beyond our wildest imagination!

E. Distribute to your students Handouts B: Expectations. Have your students complete the first question and call on students to share their responses. Then read aloud Revelation 21:2–4 (below), which is St. John the Evangelist’s description of his vision of Heaven. After reading it, ask your students how John describes Heaven. (He describes it as a holy city, like a bride, where God will dwell with His people, and He will wipe away every tear, and there will be no more death, mourning, wailing, or pain.) Then have your students draw a picture in the space provided of what they think Heaven will be like.

Revelation 21:2–4
I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.”

Formative Assessment
A. Distribute to each student three strips of the purple construction paper and one strip of the pink construction paper that you cut before class. On each of the purple strips, have your students write one thing they can do during the rest of Advent to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Encourage them to think about specific things they can do to imitate Christ and serve others. On the pink strips, have your students write one reason to be joyful or thankful during the Advent and Christmas seasons.
B. After your students have finished writing, have them create a chain out of their strips of paper with three purple strips in a row linked to the pink strip. Have them interlock the pieces of paper and glue or tape them together, leaving one unglued or taped together. Then, gather all of the chains together from the class and link them together to form one large class chain. (Order the links so that there are not pink strips connected to each other.) Display the large class chain in your classroom and encourage your students to commit to doing the things they wrote about during the remaining time in Advent.
A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 11:2-11: Jesus’ Testimony to John

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.
before you. Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Focus Questions

1. What did John tell his disciples to ask Jesus?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Who does Jesus call blessed?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Who does Jesus say is greater than John the Baptist?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Jesus calls John the Baptist a messenger. Have you ever been given a message to deliver? When? What was the message?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Expectations

Part 1: Describe a time when you were looking forward to something happening. What were you looking forward to? Why? What ended up happening? How did you feel afterward?

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___________________________________________________
Part 2: Draw a picture below of what you think Heaven will be like.
Answer Key

Handout A: Third Week of Advent

1. “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”
2. The one who takes no offense at Him.
3. No one born of a woman is greater than John the Baptist, “yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”
4. Accept reasoned answers.
The Joy of Advent: Week 4, Lower 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.
› Mary is Jesus’ mother and our mother. She is blessed among women.
› Jesus is the Light of the World. During Christmas, especially, we celebrate His light shining in the darkness.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

› CCC 484-487
› CCC 522-525

Vocabulary

› Annunciation
› Christmas

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

“She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”
MATTHEW 1:21

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
JOHN 1:5
Lesson Plan

Teacher’s Note: Because of this year’s calendar, the Fourth Sunday of Advent falls on December 22. Therefore, this year, the fourth week of Advent is only three days. It is likely that you and your students will already be on Christmas vacation. The lesson that we present here for this fourth week of Advent is intended for you to send home with students to complete with their parents over Christmas vacation.

Warm-Up

Ask your students to sing the Christmas carol “Joy to the World” with their families or read the lyrics on Handout A: Joy to the World as a class. Encourage them to sing the carol as a prayer, listening carefully to the words of the song and thinking about why we celebrate the joy of Christmas.

Activity

A. Explain to your students that even though the fourth week of Advent is only three days this year, very soon we will celebrate the birth of Jesus! This begins a new season in the life of the Church: Christmas. The Christmas season lasts until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. During this period of more than two weeks, we celebrate the coming of the Light of the World, the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We joyfully reflect on the Good News of Jesus Christ: that our salvation has come.
B. Send home with your students the Handout B: Joy of the Gospel worksheets. Have them complete the following with their families:

C. Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26–38: Read with their families and answer and discuss the focus questions together.

- **Impossible Things**: Read about God’s people throughout Salvation History and discuss the reflection questions together.

- **Light of the World**: Read the Gospel passage, then answer the focus questions.

- **Adoration of the Shepherds**: Reflect on the painting together using the conversation questions provided.

- **Adoration of the Shepherds Coloring Page**: Encourage your students to display the coloring page at home during the Christmas season as a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.

E. Finally, encourage and challenge your students to think of different ways in which they can share the joy of Christ with others during their Christmas vacation. Specifically challenge them to imitate Christ by loving and serving others in concrete ways. Perhaps they can help serve at a soup kitchen with their families or visit a sick family member or friend. Perhaps they can spend extra time in prayer for someone who is need of prayer. Encourage them to be creative and think of ways to share the joy of Christmas with others that they might not ordinarily do.
Joy to the World

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
   Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
   And heav’n and nature sing,
   And heav’n and nature sing,
   And heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;
   Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
   Repeat the sounding joy,
   Repeat the sounding joy,
   Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
No more let sins and sorrows grow,
   nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessing flow
   far as the curse is found,
   far as the curse is found,
   far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
   And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
   And wonders of His love,
   And wonders of His love,
   And wonders, wonders of His love.
HANDOUT B: Teaching the Liturgical Year

Joy of the Gospel

Fourth Week of Advent Packet
Fourth Week of Advent (Lower Elementary)

Directions: With your family, read the Gospel passage, then discuss the questions that follow.

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 1:18-24: The Birth of Jesus

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had
said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

**Focus Questions**

1. How does this Gospel describe Joseph?

   ____________________________________________________________

2. Who appeared to Joseph in a dream?

   ____________________________________________________________

3. What was Joseph told to do?

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

4. What does “Emmanuel” mean? Why do you think it is a good title for Jesus?

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
Impossible Things

Directions: With your family, read about how God has asked seemingly impossible things of His people throughout Salvation History. Then discuss with your family the reflection questions below.

Throughout Salvation History God asked His people to do things that seemed impossible. He asked Noah to build an ark. He asked Abraham to sacrifice His only son. He asked Moses to lead His people out of slavery. He asked David to stand up to Goliath. He asked Mary to be the Mother of God. He asked Joseph to protect Mary and Jesus.

In every one of these stories God asked His people to do something that seemed impossible. And each person had faith in God and said yes. They did as God asked even if it was hard to do, or if they would be made fun of, or even if they had risk their own lives. Their faith in God helped them to do great things!
Reflection Questions

1. What is the hardest thing you have ever had to do? Why was it so hard for you to do it? What did you do to prepare? How did it turn out in the end?

2. Has someone ever asked you to do something that you thought was impossible? How did you respond?

3. Do you think God still asks us to do “impossible” or “absurd” things today? Why or why not?

4. How can Mary’s faith in God help you to say yes to God in your own life?

5. What can you do to allow God to work through you?
A Reading from the Gospel of John 1:1-5, 9-14: The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice
nor by a man’s decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.

Focus Questions

1. Who was in the beginning with God?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What came to be through the Word?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. What shines in the darkness and will not be overcome by it?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. The Word is Jesus Christ. What do we learn about Jesus from this Gospel?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Adoration of the Shepherds
GERARD VAN HONTHORST (1592–1656)

Pomerania State Museum.
Directions: Take some time to quietly view and reflect on the painting. Then discuss the questions below.

1. What stands out to you about this painting?

2. Who are the people in this painting?

3. Where is the source of light in this painting? Why do you think the artist chose to depict the light source in this way?

4. Whom is Mary looking at? What is she doing? What does this tell us about Mary’s role in our Catholic Faith?

5. The beginning of John’s Gospel tells us about the Word of God, the Light of the World shining in the darkness, and the glory of God revealed. Reread the Gospel story. How does this painting illustrate the truths made known in this Gospel reading?
Adoration of the Shepherds
Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (Lower Elementary)

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23: The Flight to Egypt and the Return from Egypt

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”… When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. He 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.”

**Focus Questions**

1. Why did the angel tell Joseph to fly to Egypt?

2. How long did Joseph, Mary, and Jesus live in Egypt?

3. What land did Joseph take his family to after they left Egypt?

4. Why is it good to know that Jesus grew up in Nazareth?

5. Why do you think the angel only spoke to Joseph in his dreams?

**Activity**

Discuss with your family all of the ways that have found joy this Christmas season. What are two ways that you and your family can discover Christ in new ways during this Christmas season? Then, sing Joy to the World together, reflecting on the words of the song together as a prayer.
Joy to the World

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessing flow
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders, wonders of his love.
Answer Key

Fourth Week of Advent
1. It says he was a righteous man.
2. An angel of the Lord.
3. To not be afraid to take Mary into his home, (to marry her) and to name their son “Jesus.”
4. “God is with us.” Accept reasoned answers. Because Jesus is both God and man.

Christmas Day
1. The Word.
2. All things.
3. Life
4. Accept reasoned answers, which may include that He was in the beginning with God, all things were made through Him, He is the light of the world, He shines in the darkness, He was no accepted by His people, He revealed the Father’s glory, He revealed truth, and so forth.

Adoration of the Shepherds
1. Accept reasoned answers.
3. Jesus Himself is the only source of light in the painting. The artist was depicting the Light of the World shining in the darkness, and the glory of God (as John speaks of in His Gospel).
4. Mary is looking directly at Jesus, and she is pulling back His blanket to reveal Him to the shepherds. Mary’s role in our faith is always to reveal her Son, Jesus, to us and direct us to Him.
5. Accept reasoned answers.

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph:
1. Because Herod wanted to find Jesus and kill Him.
2. Until Herod died.
3. To the land of Israel.
4. Because it fulfills the prophecy about Jesus which said, “He shall be called a Nazorean.”
5. Accept reasoned answers.
The JOY of ADVENT

Teaching the Liturgical Year

Lessons for 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.
- God prepared His people from the very beginning for Christ's coming and for salvation.
- The Advent wreath and candles, the Jesse Tree, and Advent calendars are symbols of the Advent season.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

- CCC 522-525

Vocabulary

- Advent
- Advent Wreath
- Advent Calendar
- Jesse Tree
- Messiah

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

ISAIAH 11:1

She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

LUKE 2:7
Lesson Plan

**Materials**
- Handout A: First Week of Advent
- Handout B: Advent: The Coming of Our Savior
- Handout C: Waiting
- Handout D: Advent Poem
- Handout E: Symbols of Advent
- Handout F: Ornament Template

**Prayer**
Dear God, we praise you and adore you. Thank you for preparing us, your people, for the coming of your Son. Thank you for sending Jesus to us, to show us your love and to save us from sin. Help us to prepare our hearts to welcome your Son at Christmas. Help us to know the joy that He brings to the world. Amen.

**HANDOUT A: Teaching the Liturgical Year**

**First Week of Advent (Middle and Upper)**

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 24:37-44:

For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days before the Flood. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, just as people do these days. But in the days before Noah, the Flood came and swept them all away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.

**Focus Questions**
1. To what does Jesus compare the coming of the Son of Man? Why?
2. What do you think Jesus means by His command to “stay awake”?
3. Why do you think Jesus compares the coming of the Son of Man to a thief coming in the night?
4. As Jesus does not say when the Son of Man will come, what attitude should we have towards His coming?

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**DAY ONE**

**Warm Up**

A. Begin by leading your students in the prayer for this lesson.

B. Distribute to your students Handout A: Teaching the Liturgical Year: First 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 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 (see the formative assessment for day 2 of this lesson), have a “lighting” ceremony of the first candle before reading the Gospel for this week.
Activity

A. Explain to your students that this Sunday marks the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of the first week of the Advent season. Advent is a liturgical season in the life of the Church. We celebrate Advent in the four weeks that lead up to Christmas Day. Advent is a time for waiting and 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.

B. Continue to explain that, over the next few weeks, your students will learn more about Advent and the signs and symbols of the season and will do some activities to help them enter more deeply into this time of waiting and preparation.

C. Distribute to your students the worksheet **Handout B: Advent: The Coming of Our Savior**.

D. Have your students read the background essay about Advent and answer the focus questions.

Note: You may have your students read the essay on their own and write answers to the focus questions, or you may read the essay to your students (either all at once or in parts) and discuss the focus questions orally.

E. When finished, discuss the answers to the focus questions.

Formative Assessment

A. Distribute to your students the worksheet **Handout C: Waiting**. Then explain to them that we wait for all kinds of things in our lives. We wait in line to check out at the grocery store. We sit in the waiting room when we see a doctor. We wait at stop lights, and we wait for the bus to pick us up. We wait for phone calls from friends and family members. We wait for our birthday to come, and we wait for holidays and days off from school.

"Handout B:

**Advent: The Coming of Our Savior**

**Emotions:** Read the essay, share Advent, and then answer the focus questions.

1. Why did God promise to send the Messiah?_

2. Why did God's promised salvation not happen right away?_

3. Whom did God send to save us? What are three things He did?_

4. When did God's salvation happen? How did you feel after you were done waiting? How did you prepare for what you were waiting for? How did you feel after you were done waiting?_

5. What else do we prepare for during the Advent season?_

**Handout C:

**Waiting**

**Directions:** In the space below, describe or draw a picture of a time when you had to wait for something good to happen. Why were you waiting? What was it like to have to wait? What did you do to pass the time? Then, did you prepare for what you were waiting for? How did you feel after you were done waiting? Or, do you feel the same way about something right now? If yes, write a paragraph about what you are waiting for and why you are waiting for it.
B. Then ask your students the following questions:

- What are some other things that we wait for? Accept reasoned answers.
- Is the thing or event we wait for better or worse because we have to wait for it? Accept reasoned answers. Some things we wait for could be worse because we have to wait for them, such as getting a shot at the doctor’s office. Other things are better because we have to wait for them, such as when we anticipate the fun we’ll have at a birthday party.

C. Have your students complete the reflection activity on Handout C: Waiting. You may have your students write about or draw a picture of a time when they had to wait for something good.

D. When finished, consider calling on a few students to share their stories or drawings. You may have them share with the whole class or in groups.

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**DAY TWO**

**Warm-Up**

Distribute to each student the Handout D: Advent Poem worksheet. Have your students create an acrostic poem using the letters of the word Advent. Each line of the poem should describe some aspect of Advent or Christmas.

**Activity**

A. Explain to your students that the Advent season is filled with signs, symbols, and traditions to help us reflect on and prepare for the coming of Christ. Distribute to your students Handout E: Symbols of Advent worksheets. Have your students read about the symbols of Advent and color the images.

B. When they have finished, review the Advent symbols by asking your students the following:

- Which symbol of Advent is made from evergreen branches formed into a circle? The Advent wreath.
- On which symbol of Advent are small doors opened to reveal an image of Jesus, a Scripture passage, or a small toy or piece of candy? The Advent calendar.
› The circular shape of which symbol of Advent represents eternal life? The Advent wreath.
› Which symbol of Advent is decorated with ornaments that represent important events and people from Salvation History? The Jesse Tree.
› The green color of which symbol of Advent represents hope for salvation? The Advent wreath.
› Which symbol of Advent is connected to a prophecy from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah? The Jesse Tree.
› Which symbol of Advent marks each passing day of the season? The Advent calendar.
› Which symbol of Advent is decorated with four candles, each representing one of the weeks of Advent? The Advent wreath.
› Which symbol of Advent borrows the idea of a decoration for winter holidays that predates Christianity? The Jesse Tree.
› What do the purple candles of the Advent wreath represent? Sorrow for sins, or repentance.
› What does the pink candle of the Advent wreath represent? Rejoicing because our Savior is coming soon.

C. As an alternate lesson suggestion, arrange your students in groups of three or four. Assign each group one of the symbols of Advent. Have them read about their assigned symbol and color the image. Then have each group give a short presentation to the class about their symbol.

Formative Assessment
Consider doing one or all of the following during this Advent season:
› Set up a Christmas tree in your classroom as a Jesse Tree and have your students decorate it with ornaments representing events or people from Salvation History that prepared for the coming of Jesus. Distribute Handout F: Ornament Template and have your students creatively illustrate different events. You may choose a day each week of Advent to have your students create and hang new ornaments on the tree, or spend one lesson at the beginning of Advent having them create and hang new ornaments. Suggestions for Jesse Tree ornament symbols, including Scripture verses to read, can be found at SophiaOnline.org/JesseTree. Consider looking up and reading aloud or retelling the Scripture stories as you add each person or event to your class Jesse Tree.
Set up an Advent wreath with candles in a prominent place in your classroom. Have a “lighting” ceremony at the beginning of each week of Advent. Consider reading that week’s Gospel reading as part of the lighting ceremony and having a discussion about it using the focus questions from that week’s Teaching the Liturgical Year lesson.

Create an Advent-calendar bulletin board in your classroom with flaps of paper that you can open each day during Advent. Decorate the calendar with different images of Christmas, Jesus, or images from Salvation History. Each flap could reveal a Scripture passage from the story of Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:1-20), allowing you to read the Christmas story aloud throughout Advent. Or, the flaps could reveal some sort of prizes for your students, or any creative idea that you think is appropriate.
A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 24:37-44: 
The Coming of the Son of Man

For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In [those] days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be [also] at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.

Focus Questions

1. To what does Jesus compare the coming of the Son of Man? Why?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What do you think Jesus means by His command to “stay awake”?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Why do you think Jesus compares the coming of the Son of Man to a thief coming in the night?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. As Jesus does not say when the Son of Man will come, what attitude should we have towards His coming?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________
God prepared His people for the coming of the Messiah for many centuries. In fact, it can be said that God began to prepare for the Savior’s coming from the very beginning. God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, to live in perfect harmony with Him in the Garden of Eden. They were made to know and love God as Father, and to be loved by Him. But, because of the temptation of the serpent, Adam and Eve sinned. They turned away from God’s love and brought sin and death into the world. Even though God allowed Adam and Eve to experience the consequences of their sin, He immediately promised them that they would be saved from their sin one day. God promised a Savior!

God’s promised salvation did not happen right away, however. In fact, sin had so badly wounded the human race that God had to prepare us to receive our salvation. And so, gradually, by word and deed, God worked in human history to move us ever closer to the fullness of relationship with Him that He so desired.

Then, at the appointed time, God sent His only, beloved Son to earth. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity assumed a human nature and became man in the Person of Jesus Christ. Born on Christmas Day in a stable in a small town called Bethlehem to a virgin named Mary, God became like us in all things but sin. Fully God and fully man, Jesus Christ taught us how to be holy and showed us the greatness of the Father’s love for us. And then He gave His life for us on the Cross. He suffered and died to make up for our sins. Then He rose from the dead. Our God died for us and defeated death, opening the gate of Heaven to us. Our salvation had come!

Today, and over the centuries, the Catholic Church has celebrated the coming of our Savior at Christmas. And like all those who waited and prepared for the coming of our Savior for the thousands of years before He came on the first Christmas, the Church today takes a moment to wait and to prepare. We call this time Advent. Advent is a season in the life of the Church in which we prepare our hearts to receive Christ and the salvation He offers us. It is a time to draw close to God, to reflect on all that He has done for us, and to be thankful for all the blessings He has given us. It is a time to pray to God, to talk
to Him, and to allow Him to speak to us. It is a time to follow the example of Christ in a special way and to serve others, especially those who are sick, suffering, or in need. It is a time to make room in our hearts and lives for Christ to come and dwell with us.

During Advent, we not only prepare for the coming of Christ as a child at Christmas, but we look forward to His promised Second Coming. Even though our salvation has already been won by Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, those of us alive today are not unlike those who lived thousands of years ago. Just as they awaited the first coming of the Savior, we await His Second Coming at the end of time. Then, all things will be made new. Then, if we have lived holy lives by loving God above all else, and loving our neighbor as ourselves, we will be welcomed into the eternal life He has promised and offered us from the very beginning.

**Focus Questions**

1. Why did God promise to send the Messiah?

2. Why did God’s promised salvation not happen right away?

3. Whom did God send to save us? What are three things He did?

4. What is Advent? What are two things we do during Advent?

5. What else do we prepare for during the Advent season?
Waiting

**Directions:** In the space below, describe or draw a picture of a time when you had to wait for something good to happen. Why were you waiting? What was it like to have to wait? What did you do to pass the time? How did you prepare for what you were waiting for? How did you feel after you were done waiting?
Advent Poem

Directions: Write an acrostic poem using the letters in the word Advent. Each statement of your poem should describe something about Advent or Christmas.
Symbols of Advent

Advent Wreath and Candles

The Advent wreath began as a way for families to reflect on the meaning of Advent in their homes. Today, most Catholic churches use an Advent wreath during their celebration of the Advent season. The wreath is usually made of evergreen branches formed into a circle. The circle represents eternal life. The green color of the wreath represents hope. It is a symbol of our hope for salvation and eternal life that Christ won for us on the Cross.

The wreath is decorated with four candles, one for each week of Advent. One candle is lit on the Sunday at the beginning of each week of Advent. The first two candles and the fourth candle are usually purple. Purple is a color of penance. It represents sorrow for our sins. The third candle is pink. This represents rejoicing because our Savior is coming soon. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, which is called Gaudete Sunday, or Rejoice Sunday. The light from the lit candles represents Jesus, who is the Light of the World.
Jesse Tree

Jesse was the father of King David. The prophet Isaiah wrote that “a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom” (11:1). Isaiah was writing about the family tree of King David. Centuries before the birth of Christ, Isaiah foretold that our Savior would be a descendant of King David. He would be the one who would save us from sin and fulfill all of God’s promises.

The Jesse Tree is similar to a Christmas tree, but it is not a Christmas tree. In fact, the tradition of decorating a tree for winter holidays predates Christianity! Early Christians borrowed the idea and created the Jesse Tree in order to make the practice more Christian. During Advent, a tree is decorated with ornaments that represent the important events and people in Salvation History that prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. Each week new ornaments are added to the tree to help tell the story of how God prepared His people to receive the salvation that He promised.
Advent Calendar

An Advent calendar is a way to mark each passing day of the Advent season. The Advent calendar usually has small doors or windows that are opened each day of advent. Behind each door is an image of Jesus; a small gift, such as a toy or candy; a Scripture passage for reflection; or an activity to do for each day of Advent. One by one, the doors are opened on the calendar until Christmas Eve, when the celebration of Christmas begins.
Ornament Template
Answer Key

Handout A: First Week of Advent

1. To the days of Noah and the flood. Just as the unbelieving people before the flood were caught unawares and carried away, so will those who ignore Jesus be caught unawares by the coming of the Son of Man.

2. Accept reasoned answers. We should not become spiritually drowsy and distracted, but always be seeking and preparing for the coming of the Son of Man.

3. Accept reasoned answers.

4. We should remain vigilant, always prepared for His coming.

Handout B: Advent: The Coming of Our Savior

1. Adam and Eve sinned against God by turning away from His love. They needed salvation from sin.

2. Sin had so badly wounded the human race that God had to prepare us to receive salvation. God worked gradually, in word and deed, in human history to prepare us for the fullness of relationship with Him that He desired.

3. His only, beloved Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ. He assumed a human nature and became man, He was born on Christmas Day in a stable in Bethlehem, His mother is the Virgin Mary, His earthly foster father is St. Joseph, He taught us how to be holy, He showed us the Father’s love for us, He gave His life on the Cross and rose from the dead, and He defeated death.

4. A liturgical season in which we wait and prepare for the coming of Jesus. During Advent we draw close to God and think about all He has done for us, we give thanks to God for all of His blessings, we pray, we follow Jesus’ example by serving others, we make room in our hearts and lives for Jesus to be with us.

5. Jesus’ second coming at the end of time. If we have lived holy lives by loving God and loving our neighbor, we will be welcomed into eternal life.
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

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”
MATTHEW 3:3

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: 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 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 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.
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.)
A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 3:1-12:
The Preaching of John the Baptist

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Focus Questions

1. What did John the Baptist do and where did he do it?

2. Which Old Testament prophet’s words did John fulfil?

3. What did the prophecy say the one “crying out in the desert” would do?
4. How does John say the “one who is coming” will baptize? What do you think this refers to?

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5. Chaff is the hard outer shell of a grain of wheat. It is inedible for humans and is typically either fed to livestock or disposed of in fire. John uses an analogy to describe the one mightier than he. This person will “gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” What do you think this analogy means?

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HANDOUT B: Teaching the Liturgical Year

Nativity and Annunciation to the Shepherds
BY BERNARDINO LUINI (1525)
Create Your Own Nativity Scene

Directions:
Color and cut out the parts of the Nativity Scene. Then assemble them into your own Nativity Scene that you can display at home.
Answer Key

Handout A: Second Week of Advent

1. He preached about the need for repentance in the desert of Judea, and baptized people in the Jordan River.
2. Isaiah.
3. “Prepare the way of the Lord” and “make straight his paths.”
4. “He will baptize with the “Holy Spirit and fire.” Accept reasoned answers.
5. Accept reasoned answers. Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, will separate the sinners from the faithful and the unrepentant sinners will be burned in unquenchable fire, which we understand to be Hell.
The Joy of Advent: Week 3, 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.
- John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah.
- Jesus defied and far surpassed the people’s expectations for the Messiah and what He would do.

**Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church**

- CCC 522-525
- CCC 711-720
- CCC 1023-1029

**Vocabulary**

- Heaven
- Gaudete Sunday

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**BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES**

“**Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**”

MATTHEW 11:11

“**Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.**”

REVELATION 21:3-4
Teacher’s Note: Before teaching this lesson, precut enough strips of purple and pink construction paper for each student to have three purple strips and one pink strip. Each strip should be approximately 2 or 3 inches wide and 11 inches long.

Warm Up

A. Begin by leading your students in the prayer for this lesson.

B. Distribute to your students **Handout A:** **Teaching the Liturgical Year: Third Week of Advent (page 95).** 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, second, and third candles before reading the Gospel for this week.

**Activity**

A. Explain to your students that, as they have learned, this third week of Advent is known as Gaudete, or Rejoice, Sunday. For this week, we light the pink candle on the Advent wreath (and
the priest at Mass will often wear pink vestments) as a sign of our joy for the coming Messiah, our Savior Jesus Christ, who will soon be born on Christmas Day. Then explain the following to your students:

In this week’s Gospel, it is clear that the people had their own ideas about how to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. During his ministry, John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah, for Jesus to come and to save us. And in many ways Jesus was different from what the people expected. Instead of being a rich, powerful earthly king, Jesus was poor and humble and did not rule an earthly kingdom. Instead, He served others, gave His life for us on the Cross, and established the spiritual Kingdom of God here on earth. Jesus was greater than what the people expected the Messiah would be. He exceeded their expectations! The same is true for our expectations of Heaven and the fulfillment of God’s promises to us. We all have ideas about what Heaven might be like, or what we want Heaven to be like, but the reality is far greater! What God has in store for us in the Kingdom of Heaven goes beyond our wildest imagination!

B. Distribute to your students Handout B: Expectations worksheet. Have them complete the worksheet. Then call on students to share their responses when they have finished.

Formative Assessment

A. Distribute to each student three strips of the purple construction paper and one strip of the pink construction paper that you cut before class. On each of the purple strips, have your students write one thing they can do during the rest of Advent to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Encourage them to think about specific things they can do to imitate Christ and serve others. On the pink strips, have your students write one reason to be joyful or thankful during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

B. After your students have finished writing, have them create a chain out of their strips of paper with three purple strips in a row linked to the pink strip. Have them interlock the pieces of paper and glue or tape them together, leaving one unglued or taped together. Then, gather all of the chains together from the class and link them together to form one large class chain. (Order the links so that there are not pink strips connected to each other.) Display the large class chain in your classroom and encourage your students to commit to doing the things they wrote about during the remaining time in Advent.
A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 11:2-11: Jesus’ Testimony to John

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you. Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Focus Questions

1. Where was John the Baptist when he sent his disciples to Jesus?

2. What signs did Jesus describe to John’s disciples? What do you think he was communicating by giving this answer?

3. Who did Jesus say would be blessed?

4. What did Jesus ask the crowds repeatedly? Why do you think He asked this?

5. Why do you think Jesus says John the Baptist is “more than a prophet”?
Expectations

Part 1:
Describe a time when your expectations were exceeded. In other words, how was what actually happened better or greater than what you thought would happen? What were your expectations? What ended up happening? How did you feel afterward?

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Part 2:

The book of Revelation gives us a peek at what Heaven will be like:

I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.” (Revelation 21:2-4)

Based on this description and other things that you have learned and know about Heaven, describe below what you think Heaven will be like.

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Handout A: Third Week of Advent

1. In prison.
2. “The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” He was communicating that He was the Messiah.
3. The “one who takes no offense at me.”
4. “What did you go out to the desert to see?” Accept reasoned answers. He was giving them an opportunity to reflect on why they followed John the Baptist, and to consider what John’s mission was, so they might recognize that He was the One for whom John was preparing people.
5. Accept reasoned answers. Because John himself is foretold in Scripture: “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.” He is the herald of the Messiah, and therefore has a special place in Salvation History.
The Joy of Advent: Week 4, 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.
› Mary is Jesus' mother and our mother. She is blessed among women.
› Jesus is the Light of the World. During Christmas, especially, we celebrate His light shining in the darkness.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

› CCC 484-487
› CCC 522-525

Vocabulary

› Annunciation
› Christmas

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

“She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”
MATTHEW 1:21

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
JOHN 1:5
Teacher's Note: Because of this year’s calendar, the Fourth Sunday of Advent falls on December 22. Therefore, this year, the fourth week of Advent is only three days. It is likely that you and your students will already be on Christmas vacation. The lesson that we present here for this fourth week of Advent is intended for you to send home with students to complete with their parents over Christmas vacation.

Materials

- Handout A: Joy to the World
- Handout B: Joy of the Gospel Fourth Week of Advent Packet

Warm-Up

Ask your students to sing the Christmas carol “Joy to the World” with their families or read the lyrics on Handout A: Joy to the World as a class. Encourage them to sing the carol as a prayer, listening carefully to the words of the song and thinking about why we celebrate the joy of Christmas.

Activity

A. Explain to your students that even though the fourth week of Advent is only three days this year, very soon we will celebrate the birth of Jesus! This begins a new season in the life of the Church: Christmas. The Christmas season lasts until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. During this period of more than two weeks, we celebrate the coming of the Light of the World, the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We joyfully reflect on the Good News of Jesus Christ: that our salvation has come.

B. Send home with your students the Handout B: Joy of the Gospel worksheets. Have them complete the following with their families:

- Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26–38: Read with their families and answer and discuss the focus questions together.
- Impossible Things: Read about God’s people throughout Salvation History and discuss the reflection questions together.
Lesson Plan

- **Light of the World:** Read the Gospel passage, then answer the focus questions.
- **Adoration of the Shepherds:** Reflect on the painting together using the conversation questions provided.
- **Adoration of the Shepherds Coloring Page:** Encourage your students to display the coloring page at home during the Christmas season as a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.

E. Finally, encourage and challenge your students to think of different ways in which they can share the joy of Christ with others during their Christmas vacation. Specifically challenge them to imitate Christ by loving and serving others in concrete ways. Perhaps they can help serve at a soup kitchen with their families or visit a sick family member or friend. Perhaps they can spend extra time in prayer for someone who is need of prayer. Encourage them to be creative and think of ways to share the joy of Christmas with others that they might not ordinarily do.
Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
   And heav'n and nature sing,
   And heav'n and nature sing,
   And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
   Repeat the sounding joy,
   Repeat the sounding joy,
   Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessing flow
   far as the curse is found,
   far as the curse is found,
   far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
   And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
   And wonders of His love,
   And wonders of His love,
   And wonders, wonders of His love.
HANDOUT B: Teaching the Liturgical Year

Joy of the Gospel

Fourth Week of Advent Packet
Directions: With your family, read the Gospel passage, then discuss the questions that follow.

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 1:18-24: The Birth of Jesus

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Focus Questions

1. What does the Gospel reading say happened to Mary while she was betrothed to Joseph?

2. How is Joseph described in this Gospel? How is this proved by his actions?

3. What did the angel reveal to Joseph about Mary? What did the angel instruct Joseph to do?

4. What is the prophecy fulfilled in this Gospel narrative? Why do you think Matthew highlights this in his Gospel?

5. What do you think might have happened if the angel had never appeared to Joseph?
Impossible Things

**Directions:** With your family, read about how God has asked seemingly impossible things of His people throughout Salvation History. Then discuss with your family the reflection questions below.

Throughout Salvation History, time and time again, God asked His people to do things that were seemingly impossible or absurd. He asked Noah to build an ark because the entire world would be flooded. He asked Abraham to sacrifice His only, beloved son. He asked Moses to lead His people out of slavery and to part the Red Sea. He asked David to stand up to Goliath. He asked Mary to be the Mother of God. And He asked Joseph to understand and to protect Mary and to raise Jesus as his own son. In every one of these examples, God asked His people to do the impossible, and they responded in faith. They did as the Lord commanded, even when what they were being asked to do seemed impossible or absurd, even if they would be mocked and ridiculed, or even if they were to risk their own lives. Their faith in God allowed God to do “impossible” things through them.

**Reflection Questions**

1. What is the hardest thing you have ever had to do? Why was it so hard for you to do it? What did you do to prepare? How did it turn out in the end?

2. Has someone ever asked you to do something that you thought was impossible? How did you respond?

3. Do you think God still asks us to do “impossible” or “absurd” things today? Why or why not?

4. How can Mary’s faith in God help you to say yes to God in your own life?

5. What can you do to allow God to work through you?
**Christmas Day (Middle and Upper)**

**Directions:** Read the beginning of John's Gospel with your family and discuss the focus questions. Then reflect on the painting.

**A Reading from the Gospel of John 1:1-5, 9-14: The Word Became Flesh**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.

**Focus Questions**

1. What do the first two lines of this Gospel tell us about the Word?

2. What came to be through the Word?

3. What shines in the darkness and will not be overcome by it?

4. We understand this Gospel reading to be about Jesus Christ. How do the following verses describe what you know about Jesus? “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God.”
not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God.”

5. The last sentence of this Gospel describes the Incarnation, God becoming man in the Person of Jesus Christ. Though the exact moment of the Incarnation occurred at the Annunciation, Christmas is the day on which the Incarnation was revealed to the world at Jesus’ birth. How does this Gospel reading help us to understand Christmas better?
Adoration of the Shepherds
GERARD VAN HONTHORST (1592–1656)

Pomerania State Museum.

THE JOY OF ADVENT: WEEK 4

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**Adoration of the Shepherds**

*Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerard van Honthorst (1592–1656)

**Directions:** Take some time to quietly view and reflect on the painting. Then discuss the questions below.

1. What stands out to you about this painting?
2. Who are the people in this painting?
3. Where is the source of light in this painting? Why do you think the artist chose to depict the light source in this way?
4. Whom is Mary looking at? What is she doing? What does this tell us about Mary’s role in our Catholic Faith?
5. The beginning of John’s Gospel tells us about the Word of God, the Light of the World shining in the darkness, and the glory of God revealed. Reread the Gospel story. How does this painting illustrate the truths made known in this Gospel reading?
A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23: The Flight to Egypt and the Return from Egypt

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”... When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.” He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. He 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.”

Focus Questions

1. Where did the angel of the Lord instruct Joseph to go with his family? Why? What prophecy did this fulfil?

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2. How long did the Holy Family stay in Egypt?

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3. To where did Joseph take his family after they left Egypt?

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4. Why does Matthew emphasize the fact that Jesus would grow up in Nazareth?

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5. Do you think it is significant that the angel only spoke to Joseph in his dreams? Why or why not?

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**Activity**

Discuss with your family all of the ways that have found joy this Christmas season. What are two ways that you and your family can discover Christ in new ways during this Christmas season? Then, sing *Joy to the World* together, reflecting on the words of the song together as a prayer.
Joy to the World

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessing flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders, wonders of his love.
Answer Key

Fourth Week of Advent

1. She was found with child through the Holy Spirit.

2. He is described as a righteous man. He is unwilling to expose Mary to shame, and he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, taking Mary into his home.

3. That it was “through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” Joseph was told to not be afraid to take Mary into his home, and to name the child Jesus.

4. “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us.” Accept reasoned answers. He wants his readers to see how the life of Christ fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament, and how all of Scripture points to Jesus Christ.

5. Accept reasoned answers.

Christmas Day

1. He was in the beginning with God and was (is) God.

2. All things, specifically, life.

3. Life, the light of the human race.

4. Jesus is the light of the world, who shined in the darkness of sin. He is fully God, through whom all things were made, and He became man, born as a human infant. He was rejected by His own people and was crucified and died. But, by His Resurrection, He defeated sin and death, and opened the path to Heaven to all who accept Him. His sacrifice made it possible for all men to be sons and daughters of God again.

5. It is on Christmas that we celebrate the birth of Jesus, and His Incarnation, when God Himself entered into human history as Jesus Christ. Throughout His life, Jesus revealed the Father to us and made known His glory.

Adoration of the Shepherds

1. Accept reasoned answers.


3. Jesus Himself is the only source of light in the painting. The artist was depicting the Light of the World shining in the darkness, and the glory of God (as John speaks of in His Gospel).

4. Mary is looking directly at Jesus, and she is pulling back His blanket to reveal Him to the shepherds. Mary’s role in our faith is always to reveal her Son, Jesus, to us and direct us to Him.

5. Accept reasoned answers.
Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

1. To Egypt, because Herod would try to find and kill Jesus. This fulfilled the prophecy which said “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

2. Until Herod was dead.

3. He took them to Israel, to the region of Galilee.

4. Because it was prophesied on the Old Testament that the Messiah “shall be called a Nazorean.”

5. Accept reasoned answers.