Teaching the Liturgical Year: Fourth Week of Advent

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

A Reading from the Gospel of Luke 1:26–38: Announcement of the Birth of Jesus

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob
forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.
Focus Questions

1. Who was sent to Mary? How did he greet her?

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2. Who did the angel say her son would be? What would he do?

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3. Why did Mary ask the angel, “How can this be?”

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4. What was Mary’s final answer to the angel?

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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?
Teaching the Liturgical Year: Christmas Day

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. 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
A Reading from the Gospel of Luke 2:22–40

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,” and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his
arms and blessed God, saying: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.
Focus Questions

1. Where did Jesus’ parents take Him? Why?

2. What had the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon?

3. What did Simeon prophecy about Jesus and Mary?

4. What did Anna do when she saw the Holy Family?

5. What does the Gospel tell us about Jesus after He went home with His family?

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.