

Advent 2004 Children's Instruction Option

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Introduction

Purpose: to worship in the light of the Christ, to walk the way of mission. From our gatherings of worship we begin to see the world through God's eyes which leads to confession, intercession and praise. This is the view from *inside* the church's window. From our scatterings outside of worship we look to the church as a witness that God's peace, harmony, healing and salvation are rising for all. This advent instruction intends to introduce those actions of worship which celebrate God's desire for restoration which, in turn, motivate a response to share this Good News with the world.

To children on first Sunday of Advent

The amazing thing about windows is that you can see *in* and you can see *out*. From inside we can see that it's snowing and sometimes we run outside to play in it. From outside we can see a warm house and when we're done playing, we return indoors for soup and a warm bath.

The amazing thing about church windows is they work exactly the same way. From in here (worship space) we can look out at the world. From the outside we might see people, like today, who have gathered to worship. Through these windows we can see that God is at work in the world, which is the very reason why we gather to praise and give thanks.

The sun doesn't rise inside the church. Sunlight comes in through the windows, that's true, but the sun rises outside. It's a new morning for God's whole world, joy to the *whole* world! From now until Christmas we're going to look through the church's windows to discover what is rising in the world and how that might give us reason to worship this season.

Advent 1 Peace is rising

Peace be within your walls ... peace be within you. Psalm 122:7,8

From outside, we see the church greeting each other in the name of peace. From inside, God can be seen creating peace in the world. We are called to practice and participate.

Gathering

Invite stories of games of "make believe," games of the imagination. Listen for play stories that forecast activities of adulthood such as parenting, building, householding or driving. Mention briefly how violent toys and games also prepare us to respond violently in certain situations. "The games we play as children sometimes prepare us for the activities we do as grown-ups. It might be playtime but it's also practice time."

Instruction: Greeting of Peace

“Did you know the church has its own set of make-believe activities! In this room we imagine what it’s like to grow up as a Christian. Communion is the practice of feeding each other though we’re very different. Singing is that fun activity that practices what it’s like to speak with one voice.”

“Today we see peace rising in the church’s window. Here, we have a way of preparing for peace with its own set of practices. We learn to say *I’m sorry* and *I forgive you*. Sometimes, we wash each other’s feet in church which means kneeling down like a servant. And maybe you’ve seen this one already this morning – people shaking hands! One of the customary ways that people in the church said hello was with a greeting of peace. It goes like this: one person says “The peace of Christ be with you.” And the other responds, “And also with you.”

“Can we try that? Shake hands with your neighbor. One person says, “The peace of Christ be with you” while the other responds, “and also with you.” Grown-ups are invited to stand and join in, adults may add the kiss of peace if you so choose.”

Advent 2 Harmony is rising

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant that you live in harmony. Romans 15:5

From outside, the church is seen singing harmoniously as a symbol of its union in Christ. From the inside, we see God working for the sake of unity in the world. We are called to practice and participate.

Gathering

Invite stories about karaoke singing. Listen for descriptions of soloists, recorded music, goofy performances with occasional off-notes! “Sometimes we walk through life we’re singing karaoke – one voice, sometimes forgetting the words, trying to impress the world.”

Instruction: four-part singing

“The church teaches us to sing a different way. We sing together. We might not *have* a choir because we *are* the choir. We might not sing well but the audience is not people, the audience is God and God always applauds when we praise!”

Have children gather around the piano, have congregation turn to

HWB 12 Come, let us all unite to sing

or another familiar song that lends itself to harmonization.

“The church sings what it believes: we have different voices, singing different notes but they all belong together in the same song. The song is the love of God. Listen ...”

Pianist/song leader: Using the opening chord bring in the sopranos (and children), adding then congregational alto, tenor and bass. Sustain chord then stop.

“The sound we just heard is called a chord. (have pianist repeat) It is one sound made of many notes. We call that sound “harmony.” When many different ideas are freely spoken in one room, that’s harmony. When people of different races and beliefs eat a meal together, that’s harmony. When girls can be strong and boys can be gentle, that’s harmony. When Jesus is Lord and no one else is, that’s harmony. That’s the song of God’s love.”

“We’re going to sing verse one together in a moment. I want you listen for men and women’s voices, high and low voices. You might not know all the words so the part I want you to sing repeats after every line: God is love.” (orient children accordingly if another song is chosen).

Advent 3 Healing is rising

Here is your God. God will come and save you. Isaiah 35:4

From outside, the church is seen practicing rituals of intercessory prayer and healing. From inside, the church sees God actively working to heal and forgive. We are called to practice and participate.

Gathering

Invite stories about scars, bandaids and old injuries. Survey the responses for the number of knee injuries to all the rest. “Why do you think it is that so often when we need a bandaid it’s on our knees? I think it’s because our knees are the first things to hit the ground when we fall!”

Instruction

“You know what – it’s the same as being a clumsy child of God. Our knees should be the first thing to hit the ground because that is the posture of praying.” Invite descriptions of prayer posture at home – eyes closed, head bowed, hands folded or holding hands. Describe back to the children what each of these mean – no distraction, humility, inactivity or community. “Some churches have special benches to kneel upon for prayer. We’re going to use the steps today (if not, the floor is fine) as we pray to God.

Move to the steps or the floor. Have children kneel and fold their hands.

“Many of us have required bandaids on our knees. May every scar remind us that we are broken and in need of healing. May every pain we feel – for our neighbor, for the church, for the world – be brought to God on our injured knees.”

Closing prayer

God of healing, we pray for ...

Spoken response after each line: Lord, listen to your children praying

Optional: Have congregation hum HWB 353 Lord, listen to your children while the children pray with you.

Advent 4 Restoration is rising

Restore us O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved. Psalm 80:3

From outside, the church is seen gathered around the scriptures, celebrating God's intention for the world from beginning to end. From inside, the church sees that God is actively involved in recreating that order. We are called to practice and participate.

Gathering

Invite stories of broken or damaged things – toys, furniture, clothing. Discuss methods of repair – glue, stitching, nails, tape. “What about feelings – have you ever had your feelings hurt? Is there a way to repair those?” Attend to stories with pastoral sensitivity.

Instruction

“God has concern for all things broken – relationships, feelings, even the world itself. Wow. If the world is broken ... how do we fix it?” Affirm responses (and then send them to Bush!) “One way to fix the world, and everything broken within it is to know how God wanted it in the first place. And we do this by reading the Bible.

Move to the pulpit. Have a stool available so children can try standing behind it. (Have sound system adjusted accordingly – off, if preferred. On, if children's voices will be treated respectfully.) Explain that this is the piece of furniture from which the Bible is read.

“Sometimes when we hear scripture from this pulpit the reader will say, *This is the Word of the Lord*. One way to respond is for the congregation to say, “*Thanks be to God.*” Practice with congregation and children. If your church has its customary response to scripture, use in place of what is suggested here.

On the pulpit place three Bibles: pocket sized, standard size and pulpit or congregational size. Explain: “The world is broken. The Bible tells us how God intends it to be. This Bible (smallest) might describe what God intends for your little life. It says, *Jesus called the little children to himself and blessed them*. Jesus loves you and wants to heal you.”

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

“The Bible tells us how God intends the world to be. This Bible (mid-sized) might describe what God wants for our families and neighborhoods. It says, *Love the lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.* Jesus wants to heal our families and neighborhoods.”

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

“The Bible tells us how God intends the world to be. This Bible (largest) might describe what God wants for the church, for the whole world which is why it sometimes appears on our communion table. It says that *God so loved the world that he sent his only Son so that whoever believes, will be healed.* Jesus has come to heal the whole world.

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reader: And all God’s people said,

All: Amen.

Christmas 1 Salvation is rising

So that we might live for the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1

From outside the church is seen worshipping with undeserved proximity to the Son of God. We approach by grace alone. From inside God is seen extending grace and salvation to all of creation. We are called to faithfully prepare and boldly participate.

Gathering

Invite stories of gift-giving. Solicit descriptions of wrapping and labels. The day after Christmas these stories should be lively and aplenty! Ask “How do you know which gift is for you?” (ie. it was handed to me, it had my name on it) Sometimes we hear stories about Santa Claus who checks to see if we’ve been “naughty or nice.” The difference between Jesus’ story of Christmas and Santa’s story of Christmas is that we can’t earn salvation with good behavior, and we can’t demand God’s grace with a list.

Instruction

The posture for receiving God’s gift of Jesus, the baby Christ, is open hands. We see this sometimes when people pray or sing. We are going to learn these actions with a Christmas song as we receive the gift of Jesus’ birth but really, we can raise our hands anytime we feel God’s gifts coming upon us.

Joy to the world – hands clasped as in prayer
The Lord is come – open, uplifted hands
Let earth receive her king – hands lifted higher
Let every heart – hands over heart

Prepare him room – open, uplifted hands
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing – clapping
And heaven, heaven and nature sing – open, uplifted hands

Epiphany Radiance is rising

There, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising. Matthew 2:9

From outside, the church is seen worshipping God in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel God with us. From inside, the church witnesses God, Emmanuel – still and always with us – working for the restoration of the world. We are called to practice and participate.

Gathering

Invite stories of family gathering and sending. “What do your parents say to you on your way out the door? Do they ever have to remind you to play outside on sunny days or so you make it to the bus on time? What do they say when its time to come in? How are you called? What do you say as a family when someone comes through the door?”

Instruction

We are a family of God. This is God’s house and every Sunday we are called in and sent out the same as in our homes. A call to worship is exactly that – a minister standing on the steps of the church, shouting to the scattered church, “Hey! Come and worship! It’s time to come in now!” And at the end of the service we are sent to go back outside – it’s beautiful outside! But it can be scary outside too.”

Invite stories of being outside in the dark. “Jesus is the church’s porch light. His light came into the world when he was born and it’s been our porch light ever since. It shines in the darkest neighborhoods of violence and poverty. It shines in the darkest countries of war and mistreatment. It shines in the dark corners of our homes where we live with our own kind of fear and doubt. Jesus is the church’s porch light and shines bright enough for all the world to see. I’m going to ask the minister (or other appropriate person) to come and send us from the church’s porch ...”

Have the presider raise hands in a “sending” gesture and offer a typical sending of your congregation, the sending from the *Leader* materials or from HWB 772-774.

By the end of the Advent-Christmas season 2004 children will have experienced and become familiar with:

- the greeting of peace
- four-part hymn singing
- actions of corporate prayer
- corporate scripture reading
- hands uplifted as a responsive gesture

- corporate gathering and sending

Encourage worship leaders in the months to come to repeat these important functions of worship.