

Recognize, Re-engage, Respond



As we move from preparing for the birth of Christ to witnessing Christ at work in the world, we are invited to be a part of that work in new ways. Each scripture for this week helps us to recognize who we are through Christ, empowers us to respond to God's love, and to re-engage the world as God's capable and beloved church.

Focus scripture: John 1:(1-9), 10-18

This passage from John is often read on Christmas Eve or Day because it is the only "Christmas story" we get from John. John tends to emphasize the divine aspects of Christ, and so it makes sense that John equates Jesus Christ with "the Word" that was with God at the beginning of time. John doesn't dwell in the specifics (Mary, angels, shepherds, and so on) because, for this gospel writer, all we need to know is that somehow "the Word" becomes flesh and becomes a part of our world in a new and tangible way through Jesus of Nazareth. The writer goes on to connect the event of God breaking into our world with our relationship with God. Because the Word has become human, we can recognize and respond to God in entirely new ways.

Jeremiah 31:7-14 Sometimes referred to as Jeremiah's book of consolation, this section of Jeremiah is written to console. The prophet writes to those taken from their homes during the Babylonian exile and to those left at home. To both groups, the prophet writes of a future in which God will gather up God's people again and bring them home. Most of this passage is written in the future tense; God promises joy that will happen one day in the future. The first line, however, is in the present tense, with the prophet calling on the people to sing aloud and raise shouts today for the joy that is promised in the future.

One way people of God can respond to God's love is through praise.

Psalm 147:12-20 is a wonderful example of this type of praise. The psalmist moves back and forth between the grandeur and power of God (hurling hail like crumbs) and the tender care of God (blessing of children before birth). While these are wildly different aspects of God, both are worthy of our joyful praise.

Ephesians 1:3-14 As this letter to the church in Ephesus opens, the author attempts to connect two groups with different backgrounds (Jews and Gentiles in the early church) through God's love and care. Over and over, the writer reminds the hearer that they belong to God and are beloved no matter their background. This passage contains many words that evoke deep theological concepts, but these concepts do not need to be explored thoroughly for this passage to have great meaning to the community.

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The scripture passages for Christmas 2 are written to very different audiences, but they all remind their audiences that God's love is good news, and that love is for everyone. How can recognizing this love allow us to re-engage the world as individuals and as communities of faith?

Focus scripture John 1:(1-9), 10-18

Additional scriptures
Jeremiah 31:7-14
Psalm 147:12-20
Ephesians 1:3-14

Energizing God, you know there are times when we are tired and uncertain, when we doubt that we can do your work in the world. As we approach a new year, help us recognize and embrace your love for us, so we have what we need to re-engage the world you love so much. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 3–5

The children have just lived through all that Christmas is for them. Who knows what that was! As adults we can't make any assumptions about the experience of Christmas that is the reality for the children who have come here today. For many children it is a time of joy and excitement and celebrations, but for many others it is far from that. That's why it's so important to keep wrapping all the children in the light and love of this time. Visiting "Priscilla" and discovering that she's already helped to take the lights off of the tree and is ready to put them into storage for another year provides

a great opportunity to let the children know that there are still two more days of Christmas celebration. The beginning of John's gospel may seem like a challenging passage for this age group, but actually it offers a wonderful way to continue the festival of lights that is Jesus' birth. As John the Baptizer lights each one of the candles in the story, he introduces Jesus to the children, just as he introduced the people of his time to the reality of Jesus' light coming into the world. Pray that the children will, indeed, feel held in the light for a very long time.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 1:(1–9) 10–18, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 33).
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at www.seasonsonline.ca.
- ☐ Prepare a worship space with white or gold cloth, candle, matches, offering basket, Bible with a bookmark placed in the gospel of John.
- ☐ Cut 11 hearts from *red construction paper* and place near the worship table.

Gather

- ☐ Cut out small paper people figure (see [patterns p. 80](#)) for each child.
- ☐ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ☐ Bring resource sheet "[Light for the People](#)."
- ☐ Bring votive candles or tea lights in holders (at least 10). Place unlit candles

around the room before children arrive. If candles are not possible, use LED candles or paper tube candles similar to the [Advent wreath candles](#) (p. 77).

- ☐ Bring a string of Christmas lights and an extension cord.
- ☐ Bring, if possible, song "Light of Christ" (p. 22 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #6 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Respond

Choose from options provided. Prepare and bring materials.

- ☐ **Candle snack:** pineapple rings, bananas, carrot, plates, and vegetable peeler. Cut carrot into short strips with a carrot peeler.
- ☐ **Shining light:** construction paper, yellow paint, and cotton buds/swabs.
- ☐ **Collage:** copies of resource sheet "[Smiling Jesus](#)" and recycled magazines. Cut out a picture of Jesus for each child. Cut out a variety of people pictures from the magazines.

Bless

- ☐ Bring, if possible, song "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



January 3, 2021

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Scripture

John 1:(1-9),
10-18

FOCUS To imagine God's love by looking at Jesus

Gather

Welcome children by name and invite them to talk about some of the things that make them feel loved. Invite each child to choose a paper figure. Help them print their name on the figure. (Encourage older children to print their own names.)

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to help light the candle, a reminder that God is with us. Point to the Bible and explain that it is a special book with stories about God's love.

Explain that today we will learn about love by looking hearing a story about Jesus.

Sing "God is With Us" (on resource sheet [Additional Songs](#), p. 76)

Pray Dear God,
thank you for your love.
Please help us share that love with others.
Amen.

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Leader: Hello, Priscilla. I thought I heard you singing when I first came into the church this morning.

Priscilla: You did! I was remembering some of the songs that we sang while we waited to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Do you remember any of those songs? (*Spend a few minutes singing some of those songs now.*) Tonight my family is going to put away all our Christmas lights. (*Show set of lights.*) I helped my parents take them off the tree.

Leader: Priscilla, you might want to wait. We are still celebrating Christmas – for one more Sunday! But now our waiting time is different. God sent us a wonderful gift of love – the gift of Jesus. Now we will wait to discover more about the things that Jesus did. And we will learn how Jesus helped people learn about God's loving ways.

Priscilla: Oh, we just took the lights off our tree. Now what will we do with them?

Leader: I have an idea. Wait until after we have heard our story. (*Place Priscilla nearby or have her say goodbye.*)

- ☐ **Sing Christmas songs** Sit in a circle and sing some favourite Christmas songs. Mention that we are still celebrating Christmas but our waiting time is different – we are waiting to learn more about how Jesus helped people learn about God's love.

Engage

Before the story

Remember together the story of Jesus being born. Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table. Open it to the bookmark in the gospel of John. Mention that today's story comes from the gospel of John. John lived a long, long time ago

and wrote about Jesus and he taught us about God. Use resource sheet "[Light for the People](#)" to tell the story. (If possible, darken your meeting space.) Have unlit candles placed around the room. If candles are not possible, use paper

tube candles similar to the ones used in the [Advent wreath](#) (p. 77), or LED candles.

After the story

Ask the children to name things from God's creation. Say, "God's love goes round and round and round." Then make small circles in the air and say, "God's love gets bigger and bigger and bigger as more people know God." Then make larger circles in the air and say, "God's love gets brighter and brighter and brighter as more people know Jesus and know God." Then make huge circles in the air and say, "God's love fills the world and shines on us."

Surrounded in light Sit in a circle. (You might want to include Priscilla.) Arrange a string of Christmas lights around the outside of your circle. If possible, dim overhead lights. Plug in the lights and notice the glow. Mention that these little bright lights help us to remember Jesus. When baby Jesus was born, he was a light in the world – a light that shows us how to live in God's way.

Play or sing, if possible, "Light of Christ" (p. 22 in Seasons Songbook, Vol. 7; #6 on Seasons Music CD). Invite children to move to the feel of the music.

Engage

Choose from the following activities.

- ☐ **Candle snack** When we know about Jesus' love shining in the world, we know about God too. Make edible candles as a reminder. For each candle, stand half of a peeled banana upright in the middle of a pineapple ring. Place a short carrot strip into the top of the banana as a flame. When everyone is ready, say a little prayer to thank God for Jesus, "blow" out the candles and eat!
- ☐ **Shining light** God spoke into the nothing and then there was light. Give each child a piece of construction paper and cotton buds/swabs.

Put a thick blob of yellow paint in the middle of each paper. Demonstrate how to use the cotton buds/swabs to draw paint out from the blobs in long rays to create beams of light. Children will want to spread this light again and again.

- ☐ **Collage** Jesus shows everyone how to be a loving, caring person. Give each child a yellow sheet of paper and a picture of Jesus' face from the resource sheet "[Smiling Jesus](#)." Invite them to glue Jesus onto the paper and then fill the paper with people who want to be with Jesus and know God. If the children wish, print the words "Jesus is our light" on their papers.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, "Nobody Else Like Me" (p. 20 in *SGF Songbook*, #13 on *SGF Music CD*).

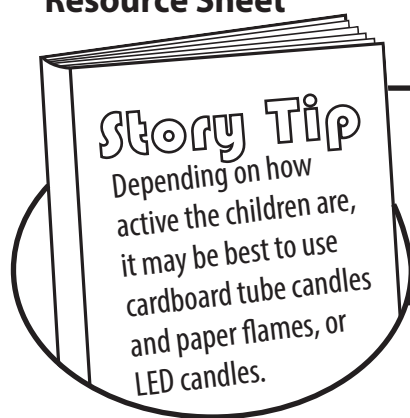
Pray Thank you, God,
for sending us Jesus.
Jesus helps us to live your way.
Amen.

Send each child out with the words, "*Child's name*, Jesus loves you."

Reflect

How do the children shine in the life of your congregation? Are you able to see God in the light they bring?





Light for the People

(based on John 1:(1-9) 10-18)

In the very beginning of time, before there were any people, or animals, or night, or day, there was God. And when God looked all around and saw nothing God knew what had to be done. God quietly spoke into the nothing and made everything!

God spoke and the sky was created!

God spoke and the water and land were created.

God spoke and the sun, moon, and all the stars were created.

And then God created people. People who would think and feel and care for this wonderful new world. This bright new world full of life and light.

But soon the people forgot who God was. They turned away and forgot God's love. They could not remember how to take care of this beautiful world. And their children and their children's children couldn't remember. They all lived far away from the light, and their hearts grew cold and sad. They wanted to know about God again.

And then one day, God sent a man named John to help the people.

"Bring me all your lights," John said to the people. And so the people brought all their lights and put them in front of John. *(Have the children gather and bring the candles.)*

John lit the first light. *(Light one of the candles.)* "I'll tell you about Jesus," he said. "When you know about Jesus you will also know about God."

John lit a second light. *(Light another candle.)* "Jesus loves all people."

John lit a third light. *(Light another candle.)* "Jesus lives in a way that is loving and good. Jesus lives God's way."

John lit a fourth light. *(Light another candle.)* "Jesus shows everyone how to be loving, caring people. Jesus helps make sad people happy, and angry people helpful again."

John lit the rest of the candles. *(Light all the candles.)* "When we know about Jesus' love shining in the world, we know about God too. Look at all that light!"

The people watched the light for a very long time. They could see how the light was making everything glow. They wanted to be close to Jesus. They wanted to know God's love. They wanted the love light to shine in them too. *(If using real candles, use the candlesnuffer to extinguish all the candles.)*



Smiling Jesus



Advent Resources

Advent Wreaths

Traditionally, the Advent wreath is a circle of evergreens, the round shape symbolizing the unending love of God and the evergreens symbolizing the hope for eternal life shared by all God's people. There are four coloured candles (either four blue or three purple and one pink), which represent the four weeks of Advent, and one white candle in the middle. The lighting of an Advent candle each week marks the growing excitement and anticipation of Jesus' birth and the white Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to celebrate Jesus' birth.

Wreath #1

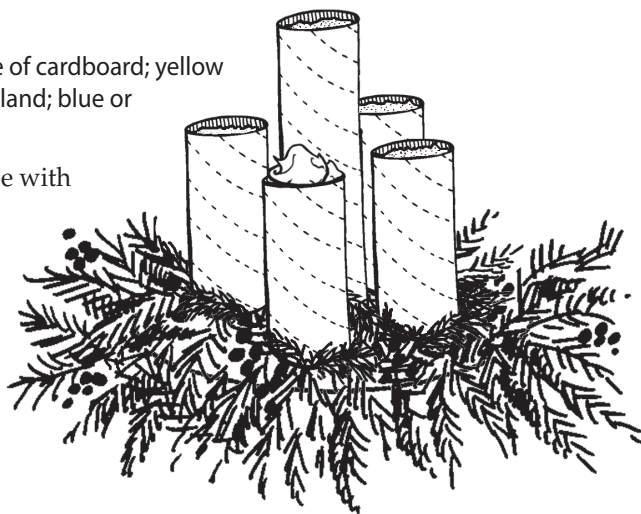
Materials: 15 cm/6 in Styrofoam circle; 4 small paper rolls or tubes; 1 paper towel roll cut down so it is slightly taller than the other tubes; yellow tissue paper; blue or purple paint; pink and white paint, greens (fresh, artificial or paper); gold glitter; low temperature glue; diluted white glue

Paint four tubes blue, or three purple and one tube pink, and the paper towel tube white. Press the paper towel tube into the middle of the Styrofoam circle. Position the four other tubes around the larger tube. (Push enough to put markings in the circle.) Remove the tubes and then use a low temperature glue to secure them in the Styrofoam. Cut yellow tissue paper into squares, brush them lightly with glue and sprinkle them with gold glitter. When dry, place the tissue paper inside the "candles" to be pulled up by the children. Decorate the base with artificial or fresh greens.

Wreath #2

Materials: 5 small paper rolls or tubes; 30 cm/12 in circle of cardboard; yellow and orange tissue paper; 60 cm/2 ft piece of artificial garland; blue or purple, pink, white and green paper; hot glue

Cover three tubes with blue or purple paper, one tube with pink and one with white. Cover the cardboard circle green. Cut slits around the bottom of each tube, about 1/2 in. up, and hot-glue onto the green base so that the "candles" stand up. Glue artificial garland around the base. Gently insert several squares of orange and yellow tissue paper into each "candle." (Twist the squares together first so they will stay together.) Each week a child can reach into the tube and pull up a flame.



Sock Doll (baby Jesus)

(Dec 20)

- Fill a small sock with stuffing almost to the top.
- Secure a rubber band around the top of the sock (illus. #1).
- Cut out a 5 cm/2 in circle from felt and draw a simple baby face on it with a fine-line permanent marker.
- Glue felt face below the rubber band (illus. #2).
- Fold top of sock down to make a cap (illus. #3).



Illus. #1



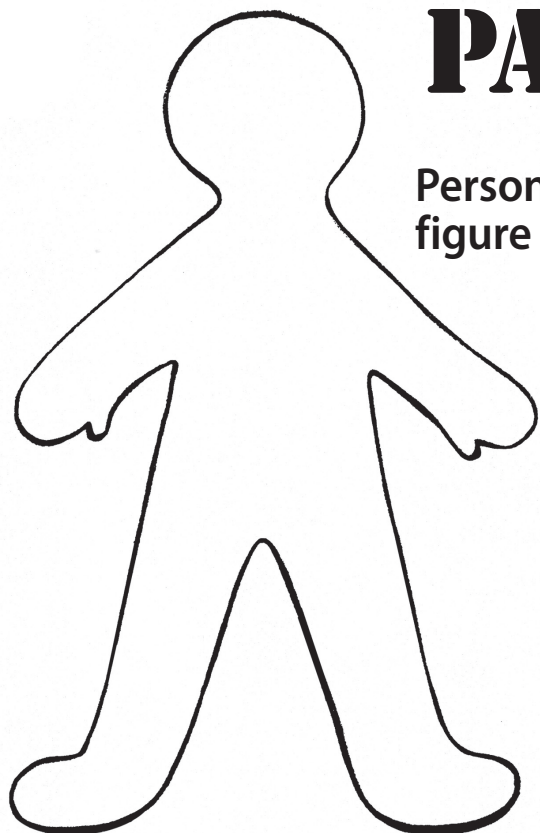
Illus. #2



Illus. #3



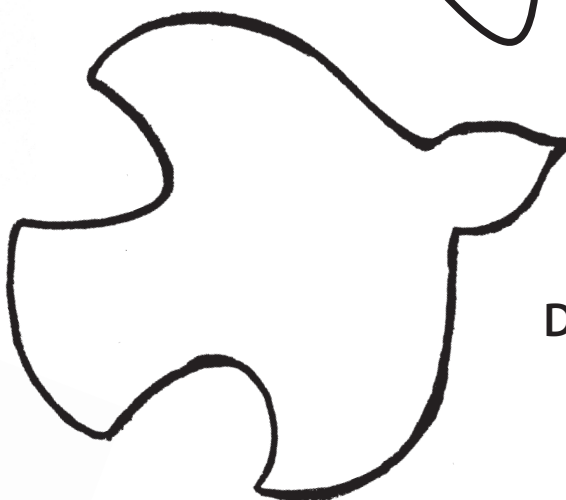
PATTERNS



Person
figure



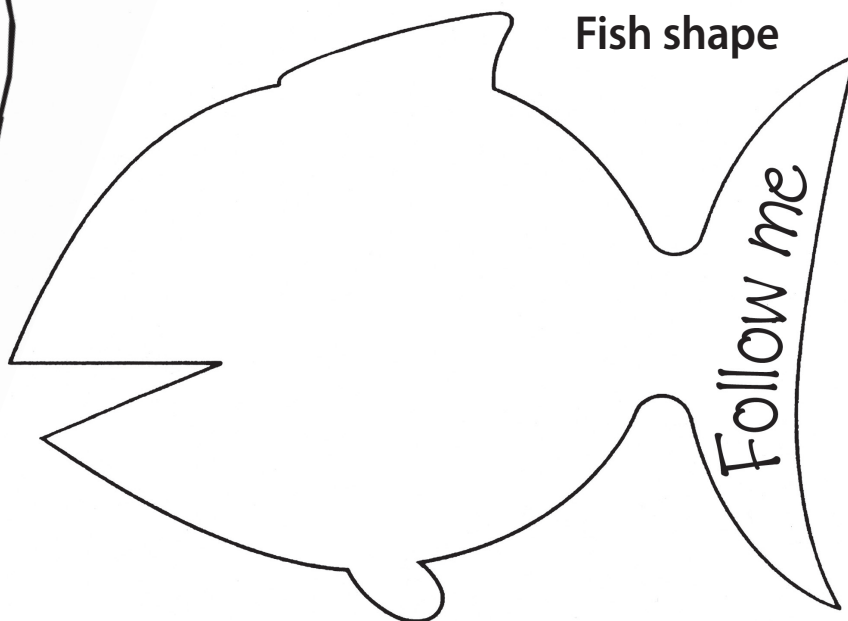
Star shape



Dove shape



Footprint shape



Fish shape

