

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 5–12

The beautiful language and poetry of John 1 might not be your first choice for the focus passage for a multiage group, but the children have the opportunity to explore the awe and wonder of it. That, too, is a theological interpretation of Jesus the Christ. It is not necessary to explain all the metaphors in the text or to water it down so much that it loses the wonder it expresses. Children can usually teach us a thing or two about awe and wonder, so let them come to this text with all the sense of mystery that they have.

The activities of this session encourage the children to experience the text rather than explain it. Look over the plan and see how the senses are involved. Children (and adults) learn through all their senses, not just hearing or seeing. Give them many opportunities to use all the intelligences they have to engage with these words.

Pray that the children catch a glimpse of the majesty and wonder of God through this session and that they keep this awe alive in their faith throughout their lives.

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. 43). Which parts of this text make your soul soar?
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (see p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook*, volume 7, *Seasons Music CD*, volume 7, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Set a worship space with gold or white cloth, Christ candle, matches, offering basket, and Bible. Place bookmark in the Bible at the gospel of John.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, song "Pulsing Spirit" (p. 27 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Pictures from Words](#)."
- ❑ Bring recording of soft instrumental music.
- ❑ For movement group, bring white and gold streamers or wide ribbons and, if possible, song "Pulsing Spirit" (p. 27 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ For light show group, bring flashlights and directions. On slips of paper, write

these words and phrases: heavens dance, lights shimmered, land formed, animals shaped, whispering trees, breath of life, God was life, a bright light, Jesus, a light, God's love, the heart of God.

- ❑ For the Bible story and us, bring, if possible, song "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Art zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Love Lights](#)," heavy paper/card stock, kitchen foil, permanent markers, and glitter glue, sequins, shiny small beads, or foil ribbon
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** writing paper, pencils, copies of star templates from this week's resource sheet "[Love Lights](#)," and (optional) black paper and gel pens
- ❑ **Community zone:** this week's resource sheet "[Collage](#)," black construction paper, and various art supplies

Blessing

- ❑ Bring, if possible, songs "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7), and "Pulsing Spirit" (p. 27 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



January 3, 2021

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Scripture

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

FOCUS To imagine, with John, a way of telling about Jesus

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. Have them place their offerings in the basket on the worship table.

Call to gather Play "Pulsing Spirit" (p. 27 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7). Invite the children to gather in the worship space. Light the Christ candle.

Opening ritual

Call to worship and learn Invite children to repeat each line of the poem about the Season of Christmas after you:

**Advent was a time to wait,
Now it's time to celebrate!
Today one candle we will light
And its flame will be so bright.
"Praise to God," we all do say,
For Christ was born on Christmas Day.**

Light, or help a child light, the Christ candle.

Prayer Ask a child to hold the offering basket. Pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

**God of hope, peace, joy, and love,
we praise you for all that you have done
for us
and we come to learn about you and the
Bible.**

**We also bring our gifts as signs of praise.
Amen.**

Receiving the offering from the child and extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to think about something that is very special to them, or that they are very excited about. Sometimes when we are excited, or something is very special to us, we have trouble describing it to someone else. It's not always easy to put our thoughts and feelings into words. Sometimes we have to use word images, or compare our feelings to something else, in order to describe what we are feeling. (For example, I was so excited, "It felt like I had butterflies in my stomach." Ask:

■ **Have you ever been so excited that you could hardly find the words to talk about it?**

■ **What did you do? What did you say?**

The Bible passage for this session is a way of talking about Jesus that uses images and comparisons to describe how special Jesus is.

Engage

Prepare for the Bible story

Another gospel Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area. Ask:

■ **All the stories we have been hearing about the birth of Jesus came from the same gospel or book of the Bible, what was it?**

After the children have recalled that the stories were from Luke, have the child open the Bible to the bookmark and read the name of the book for this session. Explain that it too is a gospel, a book that tells the story of Jesus.

The Bible story

John's special words The gospel of John begins very differently from the other gospels. The writer of John uses words in the same way an artist uses paint to create a picture. Suggest that they close their eyes to listen to the gospel of John and think about the pictures that the words paint for them. Play music softly in the background. Read the story from this week's resource sheet "[Pictures from Words](#)," based on **John 1:(1-9), 10-18**. After the reading, ask:

■ **What kinds of pictures did you see in your mind?**

This may be a new way of listening to a reading so the children will be hesitant to answer. That is fine. Thinking about it may be all they need to do at this time.

Explore the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, describe the two options. Have each child choose one. The two groups will combine their activity at the conclusion of Engage.

Movement group The poetic words of John inspire joy and celebration. Provide gold and white streamers or wide ribbons for the children to wave as the music “Pulsing Spirit” (p. 27 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) plays. Before you begin the music, lay some ground rules for moving in the space. How much the children can move around will depend upon the space available to the group. Encourage them to respect the space around others. Model the movements you desire with your streamers.

Light show group This group will prepare a light show featuring flashlights and words or phrases

from **John 1**. Provide a flashlight for each child, words on slips of paper, and these directions:

- 1 You are going to produce a light show based on John 1. Select one or two slips of paper with words from John 1.
- 2 Take turns speaking the words on your papers. At the same time, turn your flashlights on and off in random order.
- 3 Practice turning the flashlights on and off so you can do it quickly. Don’t forget to say your words.
- 4 When you are ready, tell the other group you are ready to begin.



The Bible story and us

Play “Celebrate Emmanuel” (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) as the signal to gather together. Darken the space as much as possible. As the movement group waves their streamers to the song “Pulsing Spirit,” the light show group presents the lights and words from John. You might do this a couple times for full effect. It will be a little chaotic, but fun.

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

❑ **Art zone: Shining stars** John’s writing was as dazzling as the stars in God’s creation. The children can create dazzling stars that also include John’s words. Distribute copies of this week’s resource sheet “[Love Lights](#).” Recall the star that stood over the manger in Bethlehem and how many stars can brighten the night. Go over the directions and the word list together. Add other words the children suggest. The children can take their stars home, or create a mobile to hang in the church building for a week or two before it is taken down and the stars are taken home.

❑ **Quiet zone: Shape poems** John’s poetic writing has excited people for centuries. In this zone, the children will write poems in the shape of a star. Provide writing paper, pencils, and copies of the star templates from this week’s resource sheet “[Love Lights](#)” for the children to work out their poems. Then, if possible, have black paper

and gel pens for their finished products. Display these directions:

- 1 John’s words were like beautiful poems.
Try to write short poems that tell about Jesus and God’s plan.
- 2 Use the star patterns, if you like.
- 3 Write your poem on writing paper until you have exactly what you want.
- 4 Then copy it on the black paper with a gel pen.



❑ **Community zone: Collage** The children will make individual collages on black construction paper about the mystery of Jesus and God. Set out any of the art supplies suggested on this week’s resource sheet “[Collage](#).” Help the children interpret the directions on “Collage.” Display their collages in a block so it looks like one large collage.

❑ **Outreach zone: Bringing light to others** As followers of Jesus, the light of the world, we search for ways to bring that light to others, particularly people in need. Talk together about projects that your group might

support, especially those in which your congregation is involved. If this is a time to begin a new outreach project, bring three or four choices for the group to consider.

Bless

Gather Play “Celebrate Emmanuel” (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) as the signal to gather at the worship table.

Song Sing “Pulsing Spirit” (p. 27 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

God of light, we praise you with all creation
for the gift of the one you sent to us, Jesus the Christ.
Amen.

Blessing To each child, say, “(Child’s name), you are always invited to praise God with all your being.”

Reflect

How did the children connect with this unusual focus passage? How were their imaginations engaged? Which children particularly were taken in by this text and the activities? How do you hear this text differently now?



Pictures from Words

based on John 1:1–18

Speak with an awe-filled voice as you tell this story that will suggest ways for the children to listen and respond. The music will contribute to this atmosphere as well.

(Begin playing gentle instrumental music softly.)

Close your eyes and try to imagine what it was like before the world was made. Listen to the music and form a picture in your mind. *(Let the music continue to play softly.)*

“Let the heavens start their dance,” God commanded, and so the sun, the stars and every planet were all put into the right place, while the lights shimmered in the night sky.

God sang and the land formed: the valleys with their rivers, the wide plains, and the mountains strong and high.

With wonderful words God shaped the bears, the kangaroos, the hedgehogs, and the hummingbirds!

The aspen trees grew and whispered in the wind, the gum trees stood tall and strong, and wild roses decorated the land with their beauty.

Then God breathed life into the people and placed them in the land. They were God’s children and God’s friends, created to take care of all that had been made.

God created everything. Nothing – not the smallest thing – came into being until God spoke it into place. God was life and that God-life shone like a bright light.

But, in time, the people forgot how to take care of this beautiful world. It was as if the people were living far away from the light of God’s way, and their hearts grew cold and sad.

But God did not stop loving the people, and in God’s timing, the most amazing thing happened! God came into the world in a new way, as a tiny baby.

Jesus lived a human life, like we do. The life Jesus lived is like a light, leading us to God, and helping us to live in God’s way. Open your eyes and look at the light of the candle, a reminder of Jesus. *(Light the Christ candle.)*

Because of Jesus, we can clearly see God’s love with our own eyes. Whenever we wonder about who God is, or what God is like, all we have to do is look at the way of Jesus. We can look at the way Jesus lived, listen to what he said, and see how he loved. The whole of Jesus’ life was like a love song, which is sung to show us the heart of God.



LOVE LIGHTS

Decorate these stars so that they sparkle and catch the light.

Instructions

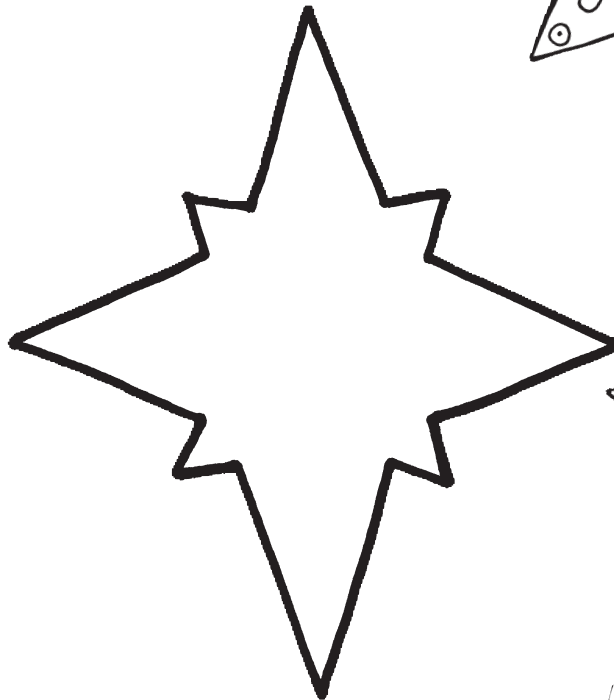
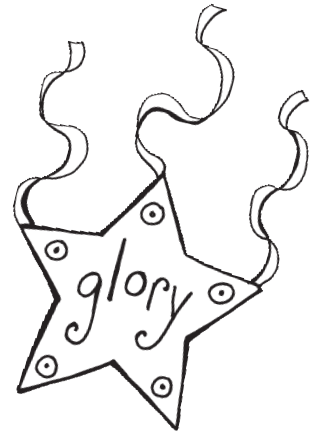
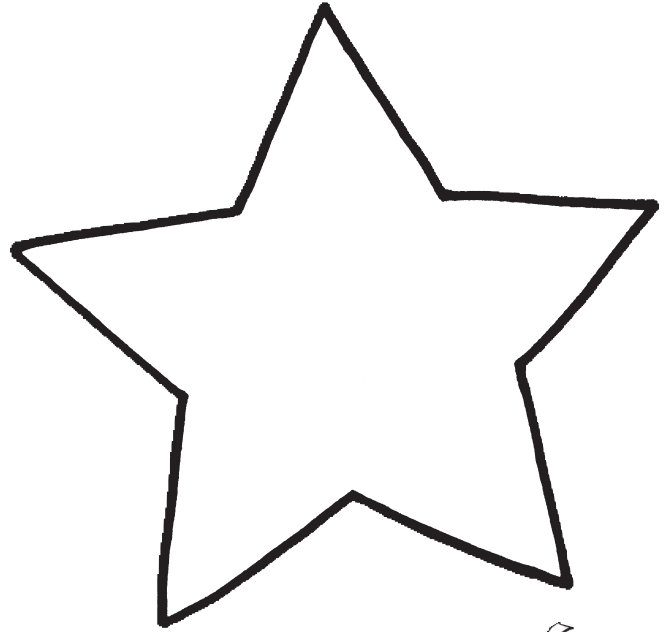
- Trace star shapes onto heavy paper or card stock (star shapes may be enlarged).
- Cut out the star shapes and cover with kitchen foil.
- With permanent marker, print one of the words or phrases from the word list on each star.
- Decorate with glitter, sequins, shiny small beads, foil ribbon as desired.

Word List

Here are some words from the story and the Bible passage (John 1:1–18) that you could use on the star shapes. Each word or phrase can be used more than once.

- God
- loved
- created
- world
- everything
- imagine
- life
- light
- love
- shimmered
- clearly
- sang
- Jesus

Add other words to the list.



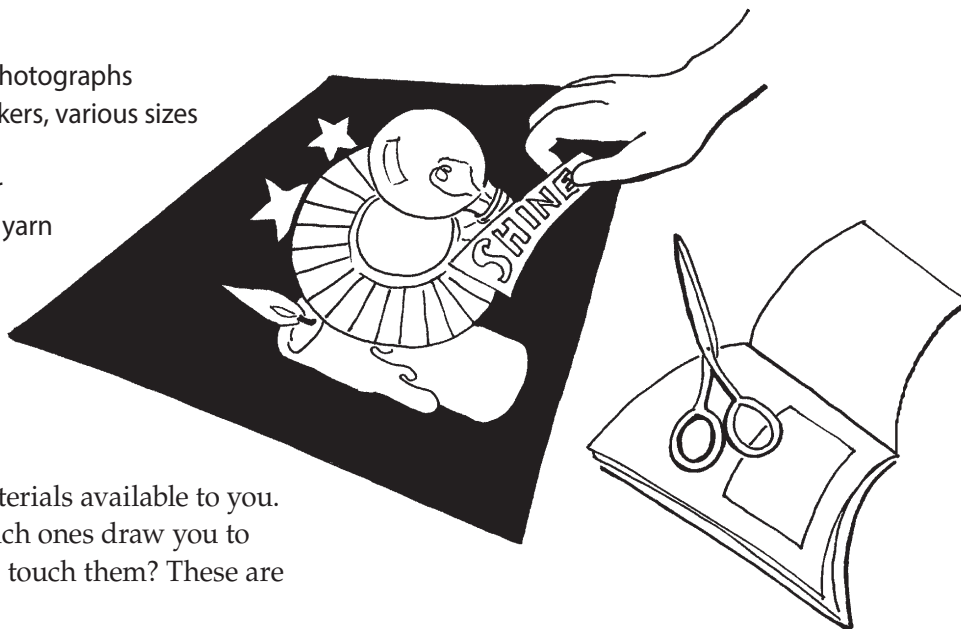


COLLAGE

A collage is an art form made by arranging pieces of paper, fabric, photographs, pictures, or other objects on a background. Sometimes the artist arranges the pieces to make a picture, sometimes to communicate a feeling, and sometimes to create an experience for the viewer. When you look at a collage, you can try to imagine what the artist is saying to you. When you make a collage, you can decide what you want to say to the people who will see your artwork.

Materials:

- ☐ magazines, catalogues, old photographs
- ☐ glow-in-the-dark stars or stickers, various sizes and shapes
- ☐ foil paper, gold, silver, copper
- ☐ pieces of wire, shiny ribbons, yarn
- ☐ reflective sequins, glitter
- ☐ glue, glitter glue
- ☐ scissors
- ☐ black construction paper



Directions:

1. Look closely at all of the materials available to you. Which ones excite you? Which ones draw you to them and make you want to touch them? These are the materials for you today.
2. Decide what you want to say to the people who will see your artwork about the mystery of Jesus and God. Do you want people to feel joy? If so, what colours and textures among the materials remind you of joy? Do you want people to have a mysterious experience? If so, what materials and shapes seem mysterious to you?
3. Assemble your materials in a way that pleases you on the construction paper background. You could arrange them in a spiral shape, or a star shape, or in a random fashion, or shooting across the page in lines.
4. When you are happy with your arrangement, glue the materials in place.
5. Give your collage a title, to help viewers understand what you feel, or what you want them to know or experience about Jesus and God.

Add life to your collage...

- Overlap materials or place them in different directions.
- Add bits of shiny foil paper to your collage.
- Scatter glow-in-the-dark stickers or glitter on the collage.
- Paint over some words or pictures with glitter glue or add glitter to white glue and paint with it.