

CELEBRATING

the Word with All Ages



By Michael G. Bausch

Celebrating the Word with All Ages” offers an outline for opening or closing assemblies or children’s sermons—times when all the ages are together. These suggestions are based on the lectionary scripture for the day. Sometimes you will need to locate resources to be used for the celebration as indicated in the section called “Getting Ready.” In addition to the suggestions for sharing that are included here, you may wish to incorporate a time of welcome, prayer, and singing into the celebration. The welcome could be a greeting or responsive words to center the group’s attention. The prayer could be shared at the beginning or the close of the celebration to underscore the theme from the focus experience. (See “Seasonings” in the center of the magazine for a complete listing of focus scriptures and focus experiences.) A time for singing could include selections from the *Word Among Us* cassette tape or other songs your group enjoys. As you prepare for the celebration, feel free to shape this outline to suit your church’s format.

November 27, 1994

Advent 1, “Behold the Signs”

Getting Ready: Find several signs to show the group, such as an “exit” sign, a “for sale” sign, or a picture of a traffic sign.

Show the signs and ask why signs are helpful. (They share information, give warning, provide directions, etc.)

Explain that this is the first Sunday in Advent, the season when we prepare for the birth of Jesus Christ. There are signs that tell us we are in a new season

of the church, a season of preparation. What do you see in the church that is a sign of something different happening? (The altar cloths may be purple or blue, the banners may have changed, there might be an Advent wreath in the sanctuary.)

Read Luke 21:25-26.

Share that Advent is a time of watchfulness, a time to pay attention to the signs of God’s love for us, and to the signs of the presence of Jesus Christ in our hearts and in our church. Have you felt the love that is growing in our church? (Share examples.) That is a sign that God is with us. We, too, become the signs of Advent when we tell of the good news of Jesus Christ and share his peace. Turn to the people around you and share a sign of God’s presence by saying, “The peace of Christ be with you,” and then shake their hands or give them hugs if you are comfortable with that. Close with a prayer.

December 4, 1994

Advent 2, “Prepare the Way”

As the group gathers, ask them to form a tight circle and sit or stand. Ask a child to be outside the circle facing you, and have the rest of the group join hands. Tell the group that you want them to help the one who is not in the circle to walk through them to where you are. What can the group do to help? (They can split apart and create a path.) Ask them to do that. When a path is cleared, ask the child to walk through the group and come forward to you. Tell the group that they have just prepared the way for that child.

Read Luke 3:2b-4. Explain how John the Baptist understood that we all have to learn how to “prepare the way” for God. We have to make ourselves ready to receive God’s saving love.

Clear paths are necessary for life. Roads and streets help us get to the places we need to go. Travel is difficult when there are traffic jams or road construction.

John the Baptist understood that the same is true with God’s love. We need to clear a path so God can enter our lives. We need to make sure there are no road-blocks or traffic jams in the way that prevent God’s love from reaching us. We need to prepare the way for God’s love.

Ask the group what sorts of things can block God’s love. (Selfishness, worry, jealousy, unkindness, etc.)

Remind the group of the words from the familiar Christmas hymn “Joy to the World”: “Let every heart prepare him room.” Invite the group to make room for Christ inside themselves by asking them to take a deep breath and slowly let it out, letting go of all the things that block the path for Christ to enter into their lives.

December 11, 1994

Advent 3, “Rejoice!”

Getting Ready: Find or recall the words to the familiar song “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy, Down in My Heart.”

Read Philippians 4:4-5 aloud to the group. Share that you will be singing the message of the scripture using the song “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy, Down in My Heart.”

In this season of Advent, when we prepare for Christ’s coming into the world, there is much that brings us joy. Ask the group to give examples of what makes them feel joyful.

Advent 3

December 11, 1994

The Candle of Rejoicing

Option: Read Philippians 4:4-7 (or Philippians 4:4-5)

Leader: *Why are you all so filled with joy?*

Response: Because we have learned to rejoice in God always!

Leader: *Let your gentleness be known to everyone.*

Response: The Holy One, our God, is near!

Leader: *We celebrate today, as we light the candle of rejoicing!*

(Light a third candle. The first two were lighted prior to worship.)

Advent 4

December 18, 1994

The Candle of Blessing

Option: Read Luke 1:39-55 (or Luke 1:39-42)

Leader: *Blessed are you . . .*

Response: What an amazing thought! My soul magnifies God's name!

Leader: *Blessed are you . . .*

Response: Can my soul contain a larger image of my God?

Leader: *Blessed are you . . .*

Response: Yet God calls me to bring Christ to earth, to give birth to God's dominion.

Leader: *Blessed are you, for your spirit rejoices in God.*

All: We light the candle of blessing!

(Light the fourth candle. The first three candles were lighted prior to worship.)

Christmas

December 25, 1994

The Christ Candle

Option: Read Luke 2:(1-7) 8-20 (or Luke 2:13-14)

Leader: *"Do not be afraid," announces the angel—"good news of great joy is now here!"*

Response: Today a Savior is born—the Messiah, God's anointed one.

Leader: *Do not be afraid! Praise God to the heavens. Seek the child and ponder in our hearts the meaning of this birth.*

All: We show glory to God as we light the Christ candle this day [night].

(Light the center candle. The four candles were lighted prior to worship.)

We also sing of the “peace of Christ” in this season. What are some examples of the peace you find during Advent and Christmas?

Celebrate the things that bring joy and peace by singing the song together. You might use this prayer: “Joy and peace are your gifts to us, O God. We pray that we might share them with others so that the whole world might rejoice. Amen.”

December 18, 1994

Advent 4, “Blessed”

Getting Ready: Learn the song “My Soul Gives Glory to My God,” found on the *Word Among Us* cassette tape, and prepare to teach it to the group.

In today’s scripture lesson, we hear a story of leaping for joy. It is about two women who are pregnant—Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Read Luke 1:39-45 aloud to the group.

Have you ever felt a baby in its mother’s body? Did you feel that baby move, kick, or punch? What did that feel like? Did you know that babies inside their mothers can hear sounds of the outside world and that, after it is born, a baby will recognize its mother’s voice? Today’s Bible story tells us of the time when Elizabeth’s baby heard the voice of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and was so happy that he jumped for joy.

There is great joy and happiness as we await the celebration of the birth of Jesus. This is a time for us to feel joy and to leap for joy.

In the scripture, this joy is mixed with struggle. Life was not easy in Palestine at the time of Jesus’ birth. The Romans controlled the country with their army, and many Jews were killed by the soldiers. It was a sad world for new babies to be born into. After greeting Elizabeth, Mary sang a song of joy and struggle. Teach the song “My

Soul Gives Glory to My God” from the cassette or another hymn such as “Tell Out, My Soul” (#306 in *The Hymnal of the United Church of Christ*; United Church Press, 1974), which is based on Luke 1:39-55.

Close with a prayer.



December 25, 1994

Christmas, “Glory to God!”

At Christmas time, one of our favorite things to do is reenact the story of the birth of Jesus. Who are some of the characters we need to act out the story? (Angels, shepherds, cows, sheep, Mary, Joseph, and—of course—a baby.)

Once there was a church that asked the children to wear various costumes and reenact the story. They had a manger with a doll in it, and all the children came from their pews and gathered around the manger. There was one little boy dressed as an angel who didn’t want to come forward. But when he saw all the other children around the manger, he couldn’t resist, and he ran to the front of

the church. There were so many children crowded around the manger that it was difficult for the little boy to see. He stood on his tiptoe, but he lost his balance and fell backward onto his rear end. Some of the other children realized what had happened and helped him to the manger so that he could see the baby.

Like that little boy, we all want to see the beauty of the Christ child. We all want to stand on tiptoe to look at the manger if we can't see it because of the crowd.

The birth of Christ has an impact upon our world. Can you tell us some ways that our world is different because of Christ's birth? (Churches have been founded, and Christ's work of love has spread throughout the world. Hospitals, schools, clinics, community centers, counseling offices, housing projects, and food programs are some of the ways Christians share Christmas in the world.)

Read the scripture from Luke 2:8-14. The story of Christmas has spread all the way to us from the first shepherds, animals, and angels who witnessed Christ's birth. Let's stand on tiptoe (those with mobility limitations can raise their arms or outstretch their hands) and say together, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!" Close with a prayer.

January 1, 1995

Christmas I, "Jesus, Amazing Child"

Read Luke 2:41-52. On this Sunday after Christmas, we hear that Jesus had grown to be a child. He traveled with his parents and others from his hometown to the big city of Jerusalem for a religious festival. On the way home he became separated from his parents, but they didn't realize it until three days later. In those days people walked, so it could take several days to get from one place to another. Have you ever been lost? Have you been separated from your parents and not known where they were? What was that like for you and your parents? The amazing thing about this story is that Jesus didn't feel lost; it was his parents who were frantic and upset. Do you remember what Jesus was doing? (He was in the Temple with the teachers, asking questions and listening, like you are now.)

Those teachers loved questions. They knew that is how we learn—to think of questions, ask them, and gain understanding.

Do you know what else Jesus was doing that day? He was giving some of his own answers. The teachers were "amazed at his understanding and his answers." This story reminds us that we adults can learn from you. Not only do children have a lot of questions, but you have also thought about a lot of things and developed some of your own answers.

In today's scripture, the child Jesus asked questions, and he shared some of his own answers to those questions. Our faith is richer when we all ask questions and learn together. Close with a prayer.

January 8, 1995

Epiphany I, "Jesus Baptized"

Getting Ready: You will need a baptismal font or a basin of water.

Gather the group around the baptismal font or basin of water. Ask them to imagine, as they listen to the scripture, that you are all present at the Jordan River when Jesus is being baptized.

Read Luke 3:21-22.

The scripture tells us that when Jesus was baptized there was a visit from a dove and a voice coming from heaven.

Like the people who were there, we are standing here to witness Jesus' baptism.

This baptismal font (or basin) and the water in it remind us of the Jordan River, and how all baptized people are brought into the family of God and new life through their baptism.

When the church baptizes someone, the pastor always asks the person's name and then says the name at the moment of baptism. Why are our names important?

Ask the group members to call out their names in an orderly fashion. After everyone has said his or her name, share that God knows us by name and accepts all of us into the family of the church. Speak these adapted words of scripture: "And God says to us, 'You are my beloved sons and daughters, with you I am well pleased.'" Close with a prayer.

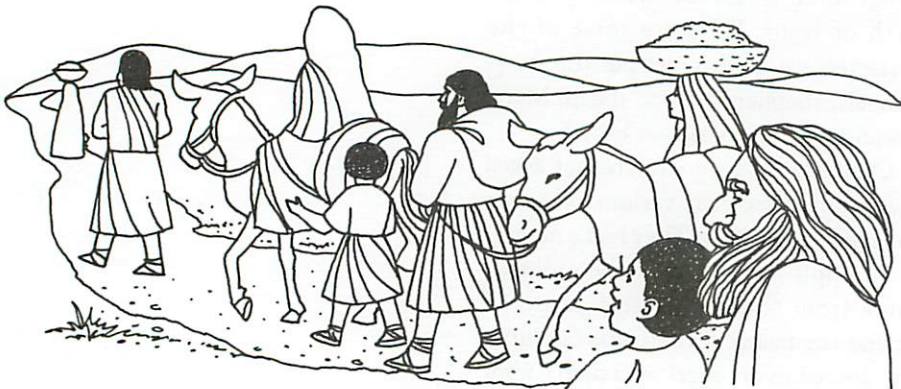
January 15, 1995

Epiphany 2, "The Wedding at Cana"

Getting Ready: Locate a symbol of a wedding, such as an invitation, a ring, or a photograph.

Show the wedding symbol for all to see and ask if anyone knows what it is. (An object that reminds us of weddings.)

Ask how many in the group have ever been to a wedding and a wedding



party. What are some of the things we do at a wedding? (Purchase a gift, go to the church to witness the ceremony, say prayers of blessing, meet new people, see old friends and relatives, dance, eat, talk, laugh, etc.)

Why are we talking about weddings today? Because we hear in the Gospel of John that one of Jesus' first miracles took place at a wedding.

Read John 2:1-11.

In this story, we are reminded that Jesus is the one who shows us God's love and power by the things he does. He reveals God's glory. This is the season of the church year called Epiphany. Epiphany means "to show." This story from the Bible helps to show us how special Jesus is and how he came to "show" us God's power to transform the old and make all things new.

Close with a prayer.



January 22, 1995

Epiphany 3, "Fulfilled in Your Hearing"

Getting Ready: Prepare a scroll with the words from Luke 4:18-19 written on it.

Invite someone in the group to stand and read the scroll.

Take the scroll and ask the group to repeat each phrase after you speak it:

The Spirit of God is upon me,
Because God has anointed me
To bring good news to the poor,
And God has sent me to proclaim
release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To let the oppressed go free,
To proclaim the year of God's favor.

Repeat it once or twice more if you wish the group to learn this by heart.

Ask the group to call out ideas about the meaning of the phrases you have just learned from the paper scroll. What would be "good news to the poor"? (They will have enough to eat, a decent place to live, heat, clean water, a job, health care, transportation to work, and childcare when they work, as well as the examples from the scripture—release to those who are unjustly held in prison, sight for those without, freedom from nations and political systems that make people's lives miserable.)

Share that when Jesus finished reading this scripture, he told everyone that "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In other words, Jesus declared that he had come to *do* what the scripture said. He worked hard with his disciples to bring "good news to the poor" and to "proclaim the year of God's favor." As Christ's followers today we need to work to bring "good news to the poor," too.

Close with a prayer.

January 29, 1995

Epiphany 4, "Accept or Reject?"

Read Luke 4:21-30.

In this reading we hear that the people in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth became quite angry with him. At first they were amazed by the way he taught. But the people became angry when he told them that God's message of good news was for all people, not just for them.

Do you ever get angry when someone tells you something you don't want to hear? Jesus was challenging the people to change their ideas about whom God loves and cares for. They resisted hearing the truth he taught. People often think that when we're asked to help others it means taking care of the needs of "our own" people—our relatives, friends, or local community. Jesus challenges us to take care of all those in need, no matter what their country, location, race, or any other distinguishing factors.

Close with a prayer.

February 5, 1995

Epiphany 5, "Do Not Be Afraid"

Is there anybody here who is a perfect person? Sometimes people think they have to be perfect in every way in order to do something. So often we think that we're not capable, and we'd rather not try something new. In today's scripture story, Jesus reminds Peter that there is nothing to fear and that he is capable of doing something new and different with his life.

Read Luke 5:3-11. Emphasize how Peter feels afraid and unable to participate in Jesus' call to him to tell others about God's love. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid."

There are many people in the Bible who thought they weren't ready or weren't the right person to do a certain job.

Teach the song "Tú Has Venido a la Orilla" from the *Word Among Us* cassette tape.

God calls us even though we might not feel worthy of that call.

Close with this "echo" affirmation (everyone echoes each phrase after you say it):

- ☞ I am lovable.
- ☞ I am important.
- ☞ I am a child of God.
- ☞ You are lovable.
- ☞ You are important.
- ☞ You are a child of God.
- ☞ We are lovable.
- ☞ We are important.
- ☞ We are children of God.

February 12, 1995

Epiphany 6, "Blessed Are You"

Jesus gathered a great crowd on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee and began to teach them. This is what he said (read the scripture from Luke 6:20-21).

Jesus told the people some great news! We call these words that Jesus spoke the "Beatitudes."

Jesus turned the world upside down with a new way of thinking and living. Invite the group to repeat each "blessed" phrase after you: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the dominion of God." (Group repeats.) "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled." (Group repeats.) "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." (Group repeats.)

How do you think the people who were poor or hungry or sad felt after they heard that message? (Hopeful? Happy? Full?) Jesus' promises give hope to those who are feeling hopeless. Jesus says, "Blessed are you. . . ."

You may wish to close with "The Bible Tells of God's Great Love" from the *Word Among Us* cassette tape.

February 19, 1995

Epiphany 7, "No Strings Attached"

Getting Ready: Have ready one four-foot piece of string for each member of the group. Also have scissors to share, one pair for every four people. Because this assembly uses the final portion of the story of Joseph and his brothers found in Genesis 45:3-11, 15, it is helpful to become acquainted with the entire story, found in Genesis chapters 37 and 39-45.

As people gather, give each one a piece of string. Ask each person to tie one end of the string to his or her own wrist and the other end to the wrist of another person. Ask the older group members to assist the younger ones.

Explain to the group that you want them to pretend that the strings are like the uncomfortable feelings we have

when we have been unkind to someone. Sometimes we do or say things that hurt others, and this can cause us to feel tied up inside. How does it feel to be strung together like this? Can you move freely?

Briefly, tell the story of Joseph, the favored son in a large family. He had the gift of being able to interpret dreams. His brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery to get rid of him. How do you think Joseph felt about this? Do you think Joseph would have wanted to get back at his brothers for doing this to him? Those feelings might have been like a string binding him to them.

But the scripture tells us that even after the terrible experience of being sold into slavery by his own brothers, Joseph was still able to love them and forgive them.

Distribute the scissors and ask people to cut the strings. Now they are free of the strings that bound them in such an uncomfortable way. Forgiveness is like that. God helps us to forgive when someone has hurt us, and God helps us ask for forgiveness when we have hurt others. We can live with "no strings attached." Close with a prayer.

February 26, 1995

Transfiguration Sunday, "Transfigured"

Getting Ready: Locate photographs or paintings that depict a halo or bright light around the head or body of a biblical person. For an example, see *The Transfiguration*, a Byzantine mosaic (for Transfiguration Sunday) in *Imaging the Word: An Arts and Lectionary Resource*.

Invite the group to sing a song of light, such as "This Little Light of Mine."

Explain that the "light" we can shine from within ourselves is the love of God in us. Ask for seven or eight volunteers to come forward. Invite them to frown or look sad. Then ask them to smile and to open their eyes wide in happiness and joy. Notice the difference in their faces. There is a radiance and energy to a smiling face that is missing from a sad or angry face. Thank the volunteers and let them return to their seats.

Show the halo picture(s). Explain that artists often show the people who are special to God by depicting them with a halo—a glow of light that surrounds their faces.

Today's scripture tells the story of the time Jesus was so surrounded by the love of God that everything about his appearance changed. This is called "the Transfiguration."

Read Luke 9:28b-29.

Jesus' appearance suddenly changed into one of brightness. Have you ever seen anything like that? (The face of a child when a friend or loved one comes to visit? The faces of new parents at the birth of a baby?)

In our story today Jesus was up on a mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling bright. He was radiating the love of God! Then a voice came from a cloud, just like it did at his baptism, and the voice said, "This is my Child, my Chosen; to this one you will listen!" This is the story of the time when a tremendous amount of love energy came to Jesus. He received so much from God that his face and garments became bright and radiant. Then God's voice came to tell everyone there that Jesus was chosen and therefore to be listened to.

Can anyone guess how Jesus may have felt when he became radiant with love? Did he feel weak or strong? Did he feel sad or happy? Did he feel alone or as part of God?

Like Jesus, we all have moments when we radiate God's love from our faces. To pray and stay close to God is one way for us to receive that love in portions large enough to make us shine.

Close with a prayer.

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