Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A, Junior High - RCLB Lectionary

Junior High Session

Isaiah 7:10-14
Matthew 1:18-24

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.
God of love, in Jesus you have come into our world and our human life.
Thank you for your presence with us.
We pray through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Opening Life Reflection

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent our theme is the virgin birth of Jesus. To begin invite the young people to create candles of joy. Provide each person with a white taper candle, or a large white votive candle. Have materials available such as puffy paints, red and green ribbon and raffia. Invite the youngsters to use the materials to decorate candles so they can be lit as symbols of joy to celebrate God's presence in the world. Discuss:

- What are some signs of God's presence in the world?
- How is Christmas a celebration of God's presence in the world?
- Why is the birth of Jesus cause for joyful celebration?

Allow time for discussion. By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Today we celebrate God's coming into the world through the birth of Jesus.

Listening to the Word of God

In the Old Testament reading listen to the prophet speak of a coming sign of God's love.

Read Isaiah 7:10-14.

Allow for silence.

Scripture Discussion Starters

- What does Ahaz hesitate to ask of God?
- What does the prophet Isaiah tell the people that the Lord will give them?
- What sign will the Lord give?

In today's gospel listen to how the words of the prophets are fulfilled.

Read Matthew 1:18-24.

Allow for silence.

- How does the birth of Jesus take place?
- What does the angel of the Lord reveal to Joseph?
- What name will be given to the child born of the Virgin Mary?
- How are the words of the prophets fulfilled?

Scripture Background

Provide 2-3 minutes of background information on the readings.

In today's Old Testament reading, the prophet Isaiah tells the people that they will be given a sign of God's love. The sign is the birth of a child to a young girl. The name of the child is to be Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." The people hopefully expected the prophet's word from God to come true within a short time. But today, Christians understand this passage to be a foretelling of the virgin birth of Jesus.

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In the Gospel today, Joseph is gently urged to trust God in a time of uncertainty and fear. Mary is found to be with child and such a pregnancy was viewed as a breach of sacred law at the time. Joseph first decides to divorce her quietly, but then an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream. Joseph listens to God's message and plans to take Mary as his wife, believing that the child in her womb is conceived through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph is a descendent of David, Joseph's acceptance of Mary gives Jesus a place in the family line of David.

Joseph is told by the angel of the Lord to give the child the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. The name Jesus means, "God saves," which indicates the child's mission. In this Gospel the words of the prophets are fulfilled in the miraculous events surrounding the conception and birth of Jesus.

Questions for Deeper Reflection

- Why is the birth of Jesus a sign of God's love?
- What do you think it was like for Joseph to hear and obey God's message?
- What is the significance of the name Jesus?

[If you are not going to continue with the doctrinal discussion, proceed to the Gospel in Life.]

Doctrinal Discussion Starters

Virgin Birth

Virgin birth describes the entrance of Jesus into this world. Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit is responsible for Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary. The miracle of Jesus' birth reveals God's power and grace breaking into the world.

The Catholic Church teaches that the virginal conception emphasizes the belief that the Messiah has only one father—his heavenly Father. Therefore, Jesus is truly God. He has an earthly mother, Mary, and therefore is also truly human.

Mary wholeheartedly accepted God's plan of salvation. The virgin birth reveals the miraculous action of God in Jesus' entrance into this world. Through the birth of Jesus, God

has come to live among us. God is with us.

- Why is the virgin birth God's loving miracle?
- Mary and Joseph said yes to God's plan. How can you say yes to God?
- How does listening to the story of Jesus' birth help you to celebrate Christmas?

The Gospel in Life

How can you spread the joy of Christmas to someone in need this week?

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At Home Family Guide, theme 24