



Sunday Gospel Background

Young people are sometimes fearful about standing out. Your child may need to be reminded that the gifts God gives each of us are intended to be used for the good of all. In this Sunday's Gospel, the master entrusts large sums of money to the three servants. Two use the money to make more, and one gives into his fear and hides it. Throughout the week, talk about God's gifts and how your child uses them. Your child may still be exploring what these gifts might be. As the end of the Liturgical Year approaches, we need to instill the sense that gifts are meant to be shared—to help others—until Our Lord comes again.

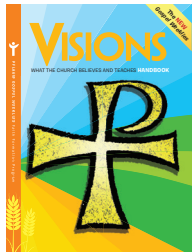
Share Experiences

Check off the boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.

- ☐ **Pray together** Mention one of your child's talents and invite your child to reflect on it for a moment. Then **pray**: Loving God, you have given everyone in our family many talents and gifts. Help us celebrate our differences and what we have in common: our love for you. Help us recognize our talents and encourage them in each other. Amen.
- ☐ **Cover Activity • What's Harder? (page 1)** Go through the chart with your child and share a few of the things that are harder and easier for you, and why. You might talk about why it's often harder for adults to ask for help than it is to give help. **Ask**: What's the hardest thing for you to do on this chart? The easiest?
- ☐ **Story • A Hard Act to Follow (pages 2–3)** Invite your child to read the story silently. Or read the story aloud together, switching at each paragraph.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 3.** *Answers: 1. Praise for her athletic ability pushes Maddie to do better; she may want to compete with Connor or make her parents proud. 2. Open-ended. 3. Doing well in sports made Maddie feel capable and good in a way that carries over into her classes. 4. The family values academics and doesn't know how important sports are to Maddie. 5. Open-ended.*

Discover Gospel and Doctrine

- ☐ **Sunday Gospel • The Parable of the Talents (page 4)** Remind your child that developing talents takes practice, hard work, and even courage. Proclaim the Gospel by dividing and reading the various parts between you. Use facial expressions, gestures, tones of voice, and movements and encourage your child to do the same.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1. The owner must have thought the servant could handle the responsibility. Instead, the servant is so paralyzed by fear that he takes no risks and doesn't even earn interest on the money at a bank. The owner is frustrated. On the other hand, does it matter how the other servants doubled their money? The parable says the owner reaps what he doesn't plant. Does the owner expect the servants to take the harvests and the land of the poor? The point is that the third servant doesn't try. 2. The owner might have been just as angry and aggressive, but he might have praised the servant for at least trying. 3. Open-ended.*
- ☐ **Connecting Gospel and Doctrine • Each Person Is of Great Worth (page 4)** Encourage your child to share about someone who uses the gifts of compassion, kindness, understanding, and forgiveness. Then discuss the Talk questions. *Answers: 1. Work gives life meaning and purpose; fairly compensated workers can provide for their needs and the needs of their family. 2. Open-ended.*



- **Open** the *What the Church Believes and Teaches* handbook to page 51. Explain that the seven themes of Catholic social teaching dictate how we live our lives, use our resources, and treat other people. Read aloud the fifth theme, which addresses the dignity of work. Repeat the rights of workers and mention the story “Minimum Wage, Living Wage, Just Wage” which you read four weeks ago. **Ask:** What do you remember about Father John Ryan’s work to protect workers?

Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 5.

- **Our Catholic Faith • Work Helps Human Beings Grow, Create, and Thrive (page 5)** Have your child read the feature silently, then choose one or two of the five questions to respond to. Your child can write or say a response. Listen carefully to what your child says here. **Ask:** How do you think God calls you to involve your whole self—body, mind, and spirit—in the work you do?

Live the Gospel

- **Catholic Faith Word • Sacraments at the Service of Communion (page 7)** Begin by calling attention to the highlighted definition to introduce the reading.
- **Living the Gospel • The Bible Describes an Ideal Wife (page 6)** Read aloud the introduction at the beginning of page 6. Take turns reading aloud *An Ideal Wife in Ancient Israel*, which is based on this Sunday’s First Reading. Talk about your responses to the three questions together.
- **Activity • What Is an Ideal Man? An Ideal Woman? (page 7)** Read aloud the directions. Instead of small groups, you can do this together or have your child work independently. Talk through the *Discussion* questions together. Instead of tallying responses for question 3, you might simply compare your responses to your child’s. For question 4, you might instead **ask:** Are you surprised by any of your own responses about abilities you value?
- **World Church • The Church Celebrates the World Day of the Poor (page 8)** Explain that popes regularly dedicate special feast days or even entire years to issues or groups they find especially important. Have your child read this feature silently or take turns reading it aloud together. Then call your child’s attention to the three suggestions at the bottom of the page. **Ask:** How can we, as a family, answer Pope Francis’ call to have “real encounters” with people who are poor?
- **Closing Prayer** Ask your child to reflect on what this familiar phrase means: “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” **Ask:** What have you learned about what you can and should do on earth, especially as it applies to workers and people who are poor? Then pray the Lord’s Prayer together.



Parent Resources

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Sunday Gospel Background

This Sunday's Gospel can be a little scary. The goats wind up in eternal punishment, reminding us of the reality of Hell. But this Gospel, which builds on last Sunday's Gospel message, also reminds us of the need to be grateful for the gifts we've been given, and how we need to share them with those most in need. While visiting prisoners and hospitals may not be practical or possible, when we offer gifts of food, water, clothing, companionship or friendship, we are following the most important message of Jesus' life—love of neighbor.

Share Experiences

Check off the boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.

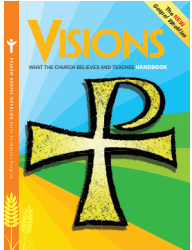
- ☐ **Pray together** Sit together quietly. Breathe in and out deeply three times, and invite your child to do the same. Spend a minute in silence. Invite your child to visualize what your family's Thanksgiving celebration may look like this week. Think of a person, event, or thing for which you are thankful and ask your child to do the same. Share your responses aloud if you want. Say a brief prayer of thanks. It can be as simple as, "Thank you, God, for these blessings. Amen."
- ☐ **Article • Lord, When Did I See You? (pages 1–3, 5)** Read the article together, section by section. Start with **Feed the Hungry** (cover, left column). Then move to **Bury the Dead** (also on the cover). Turn to pages 2–3 and 5. Have your child read the remaining examples silently. Ask your child which of the examples stood out the most. **Ask:** What interested you about it? Can you visualize yourself becoming a part of one of these organizations, or starting something of your own? Encourage your child to look more deeply into any of these organizations that are of particular interest.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 3.** *Answers: 1–2. Open-ended. 3. This is a question that we can ask of ourselves all our lives. To prompt discussion, share examples from your own life when you might have felt proud to be judged by this standard, as well as a time when you may have fallen short.*

Discover Gospel and Doctrine

- ☐ **Sunday Gospel • Jesus Teaches the Works of Mercy (pages 4–5)** Proclaim the Gospel parable by dividing and reading the parts of the Leader, Narrator, and Jesus.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 5.** *Answers: 1. Refer back to the Gospel reading to list the Corporal Works of Mercy. You can also look at the list on page 51 in the What the Church Believes and Teaches handbook. 2. Perhaps they are acting out of such a strong habit of compassion that has become part of their character; they don't realize that they are doing extraordinary acts of service—let alone that they are doing them for Jesus. 3. The least are the most excluded and Jesus includes everyone. 4–5. Open-ended.*
- ☐ **Connecting Gospel and Doctrine • Jesus Values Service to Others (page 4)** Read aloud the doctrine related to this Sunday's Gospel.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1. When we fail as a society to take care of Creation—by improperly using its resources—we harm the least among us. For example, pollution most often affects people living in developing nations (e.g., it harms crops or causes catastrophic weather disasters). When we care for Creation, we only use what we need and we use it well out of respect for God and our neighbor. 2. Open-ended.*



- ☐ **Catholic Faith Word • Mercy (page 5)** Read aloud this week's definition. **Ask:** How can we be active in showing mercy to others this week?



- ☐ **Open** the *What the Church Believes and Teaches* handbook to page 51, and read aloud the list of Corporal Works of Mercy. **Ask:** What are human beings' basic needs? *Food, clothing, drink, shelter.* Move to the list of the Spiritual Works of Mercy. Read them aloud and discuss what each one means. **Ask:** Which of these works is something you can picture yourself doing? Explain that "counsel the ignorant" does not refer to intelligence. Rather, it's a call to learn about God and share your faith with others.

Next, turn to page 40, and read aloud the section on prayers of thanksgiving. Pause to offer a silent prayer of thanks and invite your child to do the same.

Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 6.

- ☐ **Our Catholic Faith • Catholic Social Teaching Helps Us Live the Works of Mercy (page 6)** Read aloud the principles of Catholic social teaching and the suggestions for accompanying activities. Use these suggestions and the short articles on pages 1–3 and 5 to decide on a Work of Mercy your family can do together.

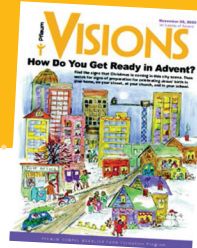
Live the Gospel

- ☐ **World Church • People Are People, Not Things (page 5)** Read this feature to provide some background on Catholic social teaching. Recall Father John Ryan and his support for fair wages for workers; the Church has a long history of supporting the rights of workers and the poor.
- ☐ **Living the Gospel • You Can Make the Difference (pages 7-8)** Read aloud the instructions on the top of pages 7 and 8. This game works just as well with two players as it does with small groups, so play the game with your child. Invite your child to be the scorekeeper. After playing the game, talk about what each of you have learned about the Works of Mercy.
- ☐ **Closing Prayer** Share a short prayer of thanksgiving, and invite your child to do the same. (You can refer back to page 40 in *What the Church Believes and Teaches* if you want.)



Parent Resources

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Sunday Gospel Background

The beginning of Advent is also the beginning of the Church's year, or the Liturgical Year. In the Gospel, Jesus tells of a man who leaves his servants in charge while he travels. Jesus reminds us to follow his way and do all we are called to do as we wait for him to come again. We might compare it to household chores or homework. If we leave things to the last minute, we might be caught off guard. Some people even make "spiritual New Year's resolutions" at this time of year, to follow Jesus' teachings more faithfully and not put them off.

Share Experiences

Check off the boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.

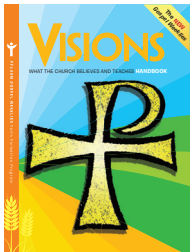
- ☐ **Pray together** (If you have an Advent wreath, light the first violet candle. If you don't have an Advent wreath, any candle will do.) Invite your child to focus on the candle as you **pray**: Loving God, our Advent preparations can bring out the best in us and in others. Help us see the wonder and beauty around us and in each other. Bless us with compassion for those who need our help. Help us remember we live in your hands—from the beginning to the end of time. Amen.
- ☐ **Cover Activity • How Do You Get Ready in Advent? (page 1)** Invite your child to spend time looking at the cover. Talk about the signs you see of Advent preparations in your community: *Some examples: Christmas trees and other decor, Nativity scenes, candles and stars, Christmas postage stamps.*
- ☐ **Article • This Was No Dream (pages 2-3)** Look at the four photos that show the destruction in the path of a tornado. Caitlin McCord, a 16-year-old girl, tells her story of being in a tornado. Read the article aloud together, switching the reading at the bold text.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 3. Answers:** 1. *The neighbors stay together to watch for the storm. Derrell and Chase warn everyone to take cover. Neighbors recover lost items. Those who are not hurt physically help those who are. Family and friends take the injured into their homes.* 2. *She came so close to death. Open-ended.* 3. *Calling, carrying her when she didn't have shoes, recovering her phone, cleaning her up, nursing her back to health, providing her a place to live. Open-ended.* 4. *Open-ended.* 5. *Open-ended; talk about your family's emergency supplies or plans. This is not meant to cause fear or anxiety, but to reassure your child that your family has a preparedness plan.*

Discover Gospel and Doctrine

- ☐ **Sunday Gospel • Jesus Says, "Be Alert!" (page 4)** Proclaim the Gospel by reading the various parts: Narrator and Jesus 1, 2, and 3.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4. Answers:** 1. *No one knows when Jesus will come again.* 2. *Through people's kind words and actions, the sacraments and celebrations like Christmas, ways people work for justice, and the Gospel. Open-ended.* 3. *We can be ready by loving and forgiving each other, sharing what we have, working for justice, living as Jesus lived, and doing the Works of Mercy.* 4. *Open-ended.*
- ☐ **Connecting Gospel and Doctrine • How Do You Use Your Time? (page 4)** Advent often feels like a huge rush—quite unlike the peaceful, contemplative time the Church intends. Take this opportunity to talk about how you both spend your time.



- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1. Set an example by sharing some ways you will make better use of your time this week. You might write down your ideas and have your child do the same. You might even keep logs of how many hours/minutes you and your child spend doing different activities, such as work, study, Internet, sleep, preparing meals, etc. 2. Encourage your child to share time with others.*
- ☐ **Catholic Faith Word • Advent (page 4)** Read this definition aloud to introduce the season we enter into this week.



- ☐ **Open the What the Church Believes and Teaches handbook to page 20.** Focus on section 2: The Calendar of Worship. Review the list of the Church's primary feast days, both as they relate to the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus and to the life of Mary, his mother. **Ask:** Why do you think these dates are so important to Catholics?

Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 5.

- ☐ **Our Catholic Faith • Advent Invites Catholics to Prepare for Christmas (page 5)** Advent means "coming." Read aloud the first paragraph on page 5, which stresses Jesus' final coming in glory. Have your child read the rest of the feature and the Q and A column. Together, brainstorm any needs you have noticed and have your child record them on the lines provided.

Live the Gospel

- ☐ **Living the Gospel • Advent Prepares Us to Celebrate Christmas (pages 6-7)** Look at the calendar together. Point out the spaces that were left blank so your child can add some additional personal activities. You might look ahead to see how you might put on the Exile play or the Our Lady of Guadalupe play in the December 6 lesson (2nd Sunday of Advent) as a family project. Invite your child to display the calendar in your home as a reminder to do the activities.
- ☐ **Closing Prayer • How Will You Bring the Light of Christ to Others? (page 8)** Gather around your Advent wreath, or a single candle. Turn down the lights, if possible. Light the candle. If you have an Advent wreath, light one violet candle. Read the Advent prayer and wreath blessing together. Pause near the end so that you can think about your Advent commitments.

After the prayer, invite your child to write ways to share Advent light on the lines at the bottom of the page. Encourage your child to refer to this commitment often during the next three weeks.



Parent Resources

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Sunday Gospel Background

While locusts (grasshoppers) and wild honey may be an off-putting diet, the characters of Isaiah and John the Baptist in this Sunday's Gospel are of great interest to us. Both call us to prepare the way of the Lord. Both refer to the first coming of Jesus at his Nativity, but in this first part of Advent, we are reminded that Jesus will come again at the end of the world. We do not know when that will be, but we are called to be prepared. How? First, by repentance and conversion, or “turning around” the parts of our lives that don't reflect Jesus. Second, by living a life that is forgiving and loving toward others. That is how John and Isaiah told people to prepare for the Messiah, and how we, who live long after he came, prepare for his return.

Share Experiences

Check off the boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.

- ☐ **Pray together** (Light the two violet candles on your Advent wreath, if you have one. If not, light a candle that is large enough to stay lit throughout the lesson.) **Pray:** Loving God, our rough places need smoothing and our low feelings need lifting up. Let us see your kindness this Advent. Come into our world where war, greed, illness, and poverty often overwhelm us. Make us overflow with love for each other. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.
- ☐ **Cover Activity • Attitudes: What Is the Best Gift You've Ever Given? (page 1)** For some people, Christmas is all about material gifts. But Advent is about preparing our hearts for the arrival of the greatest gift of all—Jesus, our brother and our salvation. Read aloud this feature together; invite your child to answer the question: What is the best gift you've ever given?

Note: You may wish to change the order of this week's lesson to provide some background about the Babylonian Exile. If so, begin by reading page 5, and then return to the play-drama The Road from Beginning to End on pages 2–3.

- ☐ **Play-Drama • The Road from Beginning to End (pages 2–3)** Explain that Scenes 1 and 2 are set in 540 B.C., near the end of Israel's Exile in Babylon. Scene 2 looks backward in history to link God's deeds in Creation and the Exodus to Second Isaiah's promise that God will bring the People of Israel home from exile. Scene 3 takes place in A.D. 70. It links Jesus' journey through death to life with God's life-giving love for the People of Israel. Mark's Gospel begins by referring to the way of the Lord or road as a symbol of God's continuing care.

Divide the parts of the play between you; invite other family members to play roles if available. After reading through the play, skip the *Talk* questions on page 3 for the moment and proceed directly to the Sunday Gospel.

Discover Gospel and Doctrine

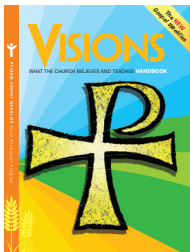
- ☐ **Sunday Gospel • Jesus Is the Good News (page 4)** Proclaim the Gospel by dividing and reading aloud the various parts.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on pages 3 and 4.** *Answers, page 3: 1. The People of Israel faced slavery, defeat, and persecution throughout their history. 2. Like the exiles, the Christians experienced persecution and the Temple's destruction. 3. God's faithfulness ties Jewish and Christian history together. Page 4: 1. A prophet speaks for God. A Gospel writer tells Jesus' story to help others believe. 2. Mark connects Jesus' coming with God's other comings throughout Israel's history. 3. Open-ended.*



☐ **Connecting Gospel and Doctrine • We Turn Toward God for All Things (page 4)**

This Sunday, we hear the heart of the Gospel—the Good News of Jesus Christ! Read the doctrine feature together and discuss the *Talk* questions. **Answers:** 1. *Open-ended. Remind your child that we can turn to God in prayer no matter how we're feeling or what situation we face.* 2. *Use a friendship analogy here. We tend to be close to people with whom we communicate regularly; this is the same with prayer. The more we pray, the closer our relationship with God. Eucharist is our prayer of thanksgiving; regular Mass attendance shows our gratitude and also draws us closer to God.*

☐ **Catholic Faith Word • Exile (page 5)** If you did not read this definition to introduce the play in this week's lesson, read it now.



☐ **Open** the *What the Church Believes and Teaches* handbook to page 7 and read sections 2 and 3 together. Explain that in Jesus, God becomes one of us. Jesus reveals what God is like.

Turn to page 11 and read section 11. Our celebration of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is this Tuesday, December 8. Explain that some Catholics mistakenly think this feast celebrates Jesus' birth without sin. Instead, it celebrates that his mother, Mary, was conceived and lived preserved from sin. Explain that because Mary is Jesus' mother, and because, in Jesus, God becomes one of us, Mary is our mother too.

Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 5.

☐ **Our Catholic Faith • Follow God's Freedom Roads (page 5)** You can guide your child through this map activity by talking about what happened in each era. In Exodus, the people are free. In 2 Samuel 5, the judge Samuel anoints David king. Second Isaiah describes the road home to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon—Sunday's First Reading. Lamentations describes Jerusalem in ruin and mourning. In Psalm 137, people are homesick and weeping in Babylon. In Psalm 126, they feel jubilant as they return from exile. In Mark 13:1–4, Jesus prophesies the Temple will be destroyed.

Live the Gospel

☐ **Living the Gospel • Giving Gifts Helps Us Think of Others in New Ways (pages 6–7)**

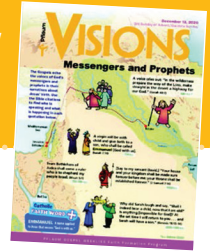
Read aloud the introductory paragraphs to this activity. Then give your child time to complete the checklist. Instead of small groups, take turns reading the gift suggestions and together, brainstorm additional ideas. Have your child complete the letter on page 7.

☐ **Closing Prayer** Read the prayer drama *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, (page 8) together. Finish by praying the Hail Mary together.



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Sunday Gospel Background

The religious leaders in this Sunday's Gospel ask John the Baptist directly if he is the Messiah or one of the prophets. John answers no. But he declares himself to be "a voice of one crying out in the desert," and says, "Make straight the way of the Lord." John here quotes the words of prophet Isaiah that we also heard in last Sunday's Gospel. John tells the people that someone greater than he is coming, whose sandal strap he is not fit to untie. As Catholics, we have an obligation to make Jesus known by our words and actions, and to recognize Jesus, especially in the Eucharist and in one another.

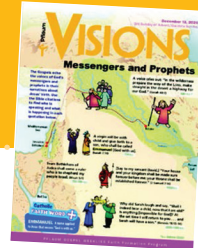
Share Experiences

Check off the boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.

- ☐ **Pray together** (Light the rose/pink candle on your Advent wreath, or any candle you have. Explain that this candle reminds us of the joy of Christmas. We light this candle on the Third Sunday of Advent because we are so close to the birth of Jesus.) **Pray:** God of gladness, speak to us through the music we hear, the Scripture we proclaim, the symbols we see, and the moods that touch us. Help us share your joy this week. Amen.
- ☐ **Cover Activity • Messengers and Prophets (page 1)** Look at the map together. Help your child find the Scripture passages. (If you do not have a Bible, you can go to usccb.org/bible.) Here is some background to help you.
 - 540 B.C. marks the end of the Exile in Babylon. The prophet Second Isaiah spreads the message that God will lead the Israelites home on a path through the wilderness.
 - In 734 B.C., the first prophet Isaiah urges a young king not to fight the Assyrians, but the king won't listen. Micah is a contemporary of Isaiah.
 - In 1000 B.C., the prophet Nathan tells King David that God does not want him to build a temple and delivers God's promise that David's throne will last forever. The prophecy, "Nothing is impossible with God," comes true when Israel's ancestor Sarah becomes pregnant at an old age.
- ☐ **Catholic Faith Word • Emmanuel (page 1)** Read aloud this definition about God-with-us.
- ☐ **Story • @therealjohnthebaptist (pages 2-3)** Invite your child to read the story silently. Then discuss the *Talk* questions on page 3. **Answers:** 1. Open-ended; encourage your child to focus on positive texts, quotes, and memes, rather than negative ones. 2. Open-ended; ask: how do you spread the Good News? 3. Matt stops other students from making Grace a villain and keeps her in the group. 4. Open-ended. 5. Grace has the skills and time to help the group organize; she wasn't telling people what to do to have power over them.

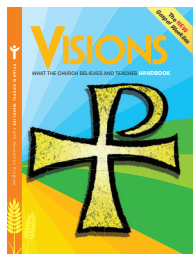
Discover Gospel and Doctrine

- ☐ **Sunday Gospel • Who Is John the Baptist? Who Is Jesus? (page 4)** Proclaim the Gospel by reading aloud the various parts with your child.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4.** **Answers:** 1. Jesus is the light that the Gospel refers to. 2. Israel's prophets promise that God is faithful and will send a Messiah, a leader who will rule with justice and bring peace. As people flock to hear the Baptist's preaching, authorities wonder if John is the Messiah. 3. First, he says who he is not—not the Messiah, not Elijah, not the prophet.



John is the bridge between the old and new. His preaching prepares for Jesus' ministry. 4. Many people expected the Messiah to be a warrior instead of a prince of peace and healing. 5. Open-ended. 6. John is both a powerful preacher and eccentric ascetic; maybe he'd be popular.

- ☐ **Connecting Gospel and Doctrine • Jesus Is God and Human (page 4)** In the joyous seasonal celebrations, we can forget the reason Jesus comes to be with us as a human being—his great love for us.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4. Answers:** 1. You might want to provide examples of stories about Jesus healing people or befriending people who were rejected. 2. Open-ended. This is a good transition into the next section, which explores what type of Messiah the people were expecting. (Spoiler alert: It wasn't a tiny, helpless infant.)



- ☐ **Open the What the Church Believes and Teaches handbook to page 10.** Read the page together. **Ask:** What reasons did the People of Israel have for expecting a Messiah? *God promised to send another king like David. They wanted to be independent of their conquerors and be a nation among nations again. They imagined a warrior, a military leader.* **Ask:** Is this how you would describe Jesus?

Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 5.

- ☐ **Our Catholic Faith • Prayers of Waiting (page 5)** Read about the O Antiphons together. Look at each circle and identify the symbol. Point out that the first part of each antiphon gives Jesus a descriptive title. The second half makes a prayer of longing for the Messiah to come. Each circle contains the Scripture reference that is its source. Keep this page and pray the antiphon of the day at meals between now and Christmas.

Live the Gospel

- ☐ **Living the Gospel • The Birth of Jesus According to Matthew/The Birth of Jesus According to Luke (pages 6-7)** This activity builds on the Bible search on the cover. Read both Gospel accounts together. Have your child complete the questions, page 6, bottom. **Matthew:** Jesus belongs to David's royal line. Jesus is God with us. David's family comes from Bethlehem. **Luke:** Jesus fulfills God's promise to David that his royal line will last forever. Like Sarah, Elizabeth conceives a child in old age, a gift from God. The promised Messiah or king will come from David's line and from Bethlehem. **Note:** Save your copies of these pages as reference for next week's quiz, "Get the Christmas Story Straight."
- ☐ **Closing Prayer • Why Do We Have Christmas Trees? (page 8)** Read aloud the three introductory paragraphs. Spend some quiet time reflecting and invite your child to fill in the Christmas tree with hopes and prayers. Gather around your Christmas tree and pray the Christmas Tree Blessing, based on Psalm 96.



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Sunday Gospel Background

The story of the Annunciation holds some wonderful lessons for us. First, we should not be afraid of saying yes to God. Mary was disturbed at the angel's words, but she listened and believed what Gabriel told her. Her yes, like ours, became an act of faith in God. Mary's yes gave God real flesh, and our yes makes Jesus present as well. It is through our prayer, the Church's teachings, and the voice of others that we can learn what God's will is for our lives. We must be the servants of the Lord, never afraid to follow his way, because with him, everything is possible.

Share Experiences

Check off the boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.

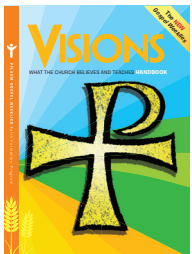
- ☐ **Pray together** Light all four candles on your Advent wreath, or simply light a few candles—whatever you have. Enjoy the glow of the candlelight for a moment and take some time to breathe deeply and make yourselves present to the Lord. Explain that this Sunday's Gospel is the Annunciation—the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will be the Mother of God. While the announcement of Jesus Christ is the most important part of the Gospel, Mary's response is also important. Her yes makes her a model of faith and trust in God. Pray the Hail Mary together.
- ☐ **Cover Activity • Get the Christmas Story Straight (page 1)** Turn this quiz into a family trivia game. Provide small prizes or treats for correct answers. You might turn the tables and have your child quiz you or the other adults in your family. You can use last week's lesson for hints, or look up the Gospel passages directly. (Use a family Bible or go to usccb.org/bible.) **Answers:** 1. A; 2. C; 3. C; 4. C; 5. D; 6. B; 7. D; 8. B; 9. B; 10. B; 11. C; 12. B; 13. A.
- ☐ **Article • I'll Push You (pages 2–3)** In this Sunday's Gospel, Mary says yes to God's divine plan for her life. At this point in their lives, young people are beginning to say yes to things that will set the course of their lives. Our faith helps us know what to say yes to—especially when that choice may feel uncomfortable or scary. This is the story of two friends who push each other to take a leap of faith, to say yes. Read aloud the story together.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 3.** **Answers:** 1. Open-ended; share your longest friendship. 2. They have been there for each other as children, teenagers, and as adults; Patrick notices when Justin begins to feel the effects of his disease. He helps Justin's wife and children. He agrees to Justin's plan to travel the Camino, even though it seems impossible. Justin supports their journey in every way he can—by being positive, physically ready, finding resources, and by encouraging their journey in the first place. He also gives Patrick time to grow and reflect while on their journey. 3–4. Open-ended. 5. It is important that Justin and Patrick were well-prepared for their pilgrimage, but it was also a sign of their faith in God that they could just let go and trust in God's providence; this is an example of faith for us.

Discover Gospel and Doctrine

- ☐ **Sunday Gospel • Mary Says Yes to God (page 4)** Proclaim the Gospel by reading the different parts aloud together.



- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1. The angel's message troubles Mary. She is confused because she can't understand how she can be a mother when she is still a virgin. 2. It is directly through the Holy Spirit's power that Mary is made pregnant; she is the Mother of God. God made Elizabeth fertile at an older age. She gave birth to John the Baptist. These births show God can do amazing things in the world through each of us. 3. She understands that her life is a gift from God; she completely trusts in God. Patrick knows that God will provide what they need on their journey.*
- ☐ **Connecting Scripture and Doctrine • We Know God as One of Us (page 5)** Read this summary of Sunday's Gospel theme. Talk about a time you felt close to God, and invite your child to do the same.



- ☐ **Open the What the Church Believes and Teaches handbook to page 9.** Read the section on angels and talk about the angel who spoke to Mary in the Gospel.

Turn back to page 8, to the section titled A Definition of Faith. **Ask:** Why is Mary a great example of faith? *Mary believed the angel's message from God even when it seemed so improbable.* **Ask:** Why is it essential to believe in God? *God is the only eternal being, with no beginning or end. God is truth and love and is willing to share this truth and love with us.*

Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 6.

Live the Gospel

- ☐ **Living the Gospel • Stand Up and Say Yes! (pages 6-8)** Begin by asking who in this week's lesson said yes. **Ask:** What did Patrick and Justin and Jesus' mother Mary risk by saying yes? Explain that playing this game with a class or other social group might mean taking some risks. However, if you play as a family, the risks for taking the actions are probably low. Still, play it anyway, and invite your child to imagine doing any of the actions with a social group. Read the directions for the Say YES! game aloud. You can play with two players, or invite other family members to play as well.
- ☐ **Prayer-Activity • Take a Virtual Pilgrimage (page 8)** Explain that Christian faith can be compared to a journey. A pilgrimage is a physical and spiritual journey that can deepen a person's faith. Read aloud this feature and take time to pause and reflect on the questions together.
- ☐ **Closing Prayer • Prayer to My Guardian Angel** Gather near your family Christmas tree with the *What the Church Believes and Teaches* handbook. Turn to page 56, and pray the Prayer to My Guardian Angel.



Parent Resources

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Sunday Gospel Background

The feasts of Christmas and Epiphany are not really about the material gifts we receive. They are about God showing his love for us in the person of Jesus; manifesting (that is what the word Epiphany means) that love to the world. Christmas was when Jesus showed himself to the shepherds, and on Epiphany, to the Magi. The gifts they brought were symbols of the real gift—God’s love. As we celebrate these two holy days with family traditions, we can remember that Jesus, born as a baby in Bethlehem, is the way God manifests his love for us. We can strive to show God’s love in the way that we live. That is the best gift we can give anyone.

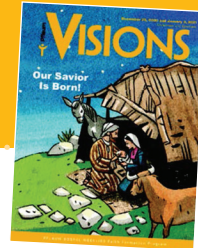
Share Experiences

Check off the boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.

- ☐ **Pray together** This is a joyous time! Gather in your prayer space. Take time to share the things you and your child are most happy about during this celebration. Then **pray**: For the gift of your Son and everything you have done for us, we thank you, God. Amen.
- ☐ **Article • They Had No Choice (pages 2-4)** Read aloud the photo caption at the top of page 2. Ask your child to define refugees and explain how this is similar/different from being an immigrant. *Immigrants do not leave their country under threat of death or violence; they may also choose to safely return to their home countries to live or to visit family.* Then take turns reading the story aloud.
- ☐ **Turn to the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1. Encourage your child to name one person and one item. 2. Open-ended. Note the many quotations from students in the article. 3. Both go on a long journey that is not their choice; however, the Holy Family returns home to Nazareth. Refugees most often never return home.*
- ☐ **We Welcome the Stranger (page 3)** Work with your child to look up the Scripture citations and respond to the questions on page 3. *Answers: angels; we welcome others as God welcomed us—and for his glory; the People of Israel were once “aliens” or foreigners, too, when they were in Egypt; they should treat them as native Israelites; hospitality and a meal; Melchizedek*

Discover Gospel and Doctrine

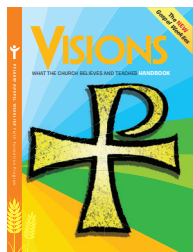
- ☐ **Christmas Gospel • Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem (page 4)** Proclaim the Christmas Gospel by having family members read the roles of Narrator 1, 2, and 3 and Angel(s).
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1-2. Open-ended. 3. We offer hospitality first (welcome and kindness), then any necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter. Ask: Does it matter whether we know the person who needs our help?*
- ☐ **Epiphany Gospel • The Wise Men Visit Jesus (page 5)** Proclaim the Gospel by having family members read the various roles.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 5.** *Answers: 1. The star points the way for the Magi. They want to see the newborn king. People of this day believed in omens. The Magi were seeking a great leader. 2. Open-ended. Consider sharing about a time you followed a new idea. 3. Open-ended; stars, planets, night skies, gifts.*



☐ **Connecting Gospel and Doctrine • Jesus Comes for All Who Seek Him (page 5)**

Read aloud this summary of the main theme of this Sunday's Gospel. Recall the story of Mary's faith from last week. **Ask:** What examples of faith do you see in this lesson, especially in the Christmas story?

- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 5. Answers:** 1. *Open-ended; through prayer, liturgy, and music; through the faith of other inspirational Christians; in Creation.* 2. *Share about times you have felt unsure or confident in your faith. Remind your child that prayer helps us at all points of our faith journeys.*



- ☐ **Open** the *What the Church Believes and Teaches* handbook to page 41. Read about the three different ways to pray. Invite your child to choose one of these ways to pray—vocal prayer, meditation, or contemplation. Together, come up with a way to pray this way today. You might sing a Christmas carol as a vocal prayer, meditate on a decade of the Rosary, or simply sit with your family manger scene and contemplate what is happening there.

Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 6.

- ☐ **Catholic Faith Word • Icon (page 6)** Read the definition aloud to introduce the Our Catholic Faith feature.

- ☐ **Our Catholic Faith • Icons Show Us Who We Can Be (page 6)** Read this feature with your child, or have your child read independently. Give your child time to examine the icon. It pictures Mary as a Jewish woman in the 20th century. Point out the yellow star, Jesus holding the Torah, and the barbed-wire fencing. The Greek letters in the upper corners stand for *Mary* (upper left) and *Mother of God* (upper right). Look through Christmas cards you've sent or received to discover how other artists portray religious images.

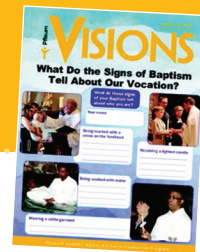
Live the Gospel

- ☐ **Activity • What Would Your Icon Tell About You? (page 7)** Read aloud the directions for planning and writing an icon. Look at the sample. Have your child read through the questions. Offer help thinking of the symbols. Provide paper and colored pencils, crayons, or markers for your child to draw with. Display the completed icon in your home.
- ☐ **Living the Gospel • Keep the Spirit of Christmas Alive (page 8)** Read the page with your child and suggest opportunities for your child or your family to serve. You don't need to do all of these between now and Christmas. Consider how they might help you make good resolutions for 2021.
- ☐ **Closing Prayer** Gather near the icon your child has drawn. **Pray:** Dear God, I thank you for my beautiful child (*name*). Help (*name*) grow in your wisdom and grace. Amen.



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Sunday Gospel Background

This Sunday, we celebrate another sort of epiphany or manifestation. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' identity as Messiah and Son of God is revealed or given voice in this world. The story of Jesus' baptism in Sunday's Gospel begins Mark's Gospel and Jesus' public ministry. The story tells us that Jesus is God's Son. Being called by God as his beloved sons and daughters is what Baptism is about. Strengthened by Holy Communion and ultimately by Confirmation, we are fully brought into the Church and prepared to live as sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus and of one another.

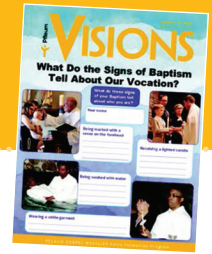
Share Experiences

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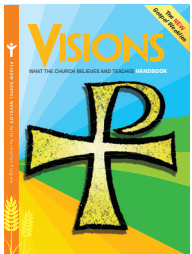
- ☐ **Pray together** "Loving God, Father Creator, you have opened the heavens and sent your Son among us. We are your beloved sons and daughters. We want your words to grow in us so that we can help build a community of love on earth as in heaven. Amen."
- ☐ **Cover Activity • What Do the Signs of Baptism Tell About Our Vocation? (page 1)**
Together with your child, identify what is happening in the four photos. Respond to the questions. *Possible answers:* Sign of the Cross—the person will be a follower of Jesus, and share the life of the Trinity; water—died and risen to new life with Jesus; oil—a sign of strength and of likeness to Jesus; candle—the person will be a child of light keeping the light of Christ burning brightly; white garment—a sign that the person is a new creation.
- ☐ **Article • The Gospel According to Mark, First to Share the Good News (pages 2-3)**
Look at the art together. Point out the symbols of Mark; the scroll and pen show Mark is a writer, the lion represents the tone of his Gospel, the dove symbolizes how the Holy Spirit inspires Mark. Look at the photos and captions of the region of Galilee in Israel. This is where Jesus begins his public ministry. Take turns reading the article aloud, switching as you reach the bold type.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 3.** *Answers: 1. Jesus the Christ the Son of God. Christ means Messiah. 2. The disciples who witnessed Jesus' life, Death and Resurrection have died or grown old. Mark realizes the Christian community needs a written record to travel through time. Mark wants Christians to remember Jesus' power to heal and inspire and to know the fear and failure Jesus and his followers lived through. Mark collects the stories from oral traditions about Jesus' teachings and actions. 3. Calls followers, preaches, casts out a demon, heals people who are sick, and prays. 4. What Jesus does his first week, he continues to do throughout his ministry. 5. In his teachings and actions, Jesus reveals what God is like. Jesus reveals God's love.*

Discover Gospel and Doctrine

- ☐ **Sunday Gospel • Jesus Brings Heaven to Earth (page 4)** In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. Make the Sign of the Cross together. **Ask:** In whose name do we pray when we make the Sign of the Cross? *God the Father, Jesus his Son, and the Holy Spirit.* Invite your child to notice the presence of all three in the Gospel. Proclaim the Gospel by inviting your family to read aloud the parts of John the Baptist, Narrator, and Voice.
- ☐ **Discuss the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1. This tear tells us the heavens have opened. God is not distant but among us in Jesus, who is filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus shows us God's love. 2. The Spirit inspires Jesus' whole ministry, including his healing, preaching, and freeing of people. 3. The voice comes from the heavens; it's God's voice, speaking as Jesus' Father and calling him "my beloved Son." The voice blesses all Jesus does.*



- ☐ **Connecting Gospel and Doctrine • We Are Blessed with Saving Signs (page 4)** Read this summary of how Baptism introduces us to the Holy Trinity. The signs of Baptism, especially those of water and light, remind of us of Jesus' saving love.
- ☐ **Answer the Talk questions on page 4.** *Answers: 1. Open-ended; you may have a special gift from a godparent, your child's Baptismal candle or white stole. 2. Open-ended; a cross or Bible are both appropriate gifts for a new Christian. 3. Open-ended; our godparents have promised to encourage and guide us in our Christian faith. They may model this through regular Mass attendance, prayer, service, or loving acts.*
- ☐ **Catholic Faith Word • Holy Trinity (page 4)** Read aloud the definition and remind your child that Catholics are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



- ☐ **Open** the *What the Church Believes and Teaches* handbook to page 22. Read the section on Baptism. **Ask:** Why does a person receive this sacrament only once? *Through Baptism, we are born into new life, to become adopted children of God.*
Once you have completed this section of the lesson, close the handbook and return to Visions, page 5.

- ☐ **Our Catholic Faith • Baptism Calls Us to Live Like Jesus (page 5)** Work with your child to read and complete the feature together.

Live the Gospel

- ☐ **Living the Gospel • We Live Sacramental Lives (pages 6-7)** Have your child read this section independently and respond to the two questions. Read the Baptismal Promises section aloud with your child. You can take the Leader roles and your child can read "All." Then reverse the roles and have your child ask you the Leader questions. Do the same for the Justice and Peace Pledge on page 7. Encourage your child to carry the card or keep it someplace safe.
- ☐ **Catholic Faith Word • Sacraments of Christian Initiation (page 6)** Read aloud this week's bonus definition.
- ☐ **Puzzle • Sacraments Are Signs (page 8)** Have your child complete the puzzle. *Answers: ACROSS: 1. blessing; 3. Peace; 5. Reconciliation; 7. catholic; 9. love; 11. welcome; 13. anoints; 14. praise; 15. seven; 16. initiate; 17. sorry; 18. Matrimony. DOWN: 1. bread; 2. sacrament; 4. Confirmation; 6. oil; 8. Holy Orders; 10. Eucharist; 12. Baptism. Items used in Baptism: water, candle, Chrism*
- ☐ **Closing Prayer** Return to page 53 in *What the Church Believes and Teaches*, and together pray the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.



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