Scripture

Resurrection Life

Jesus assures us of the reality of life eternal.

◆ Jesus parries a riddle from those who deride the idea of life after death, to affirm that the resurrection is not simply life as we know it but a new creation.
◆ Young children often can’t find a listener for their own ideas about life and death. The faith formation group should be a safe place for them to ask, muse and think aloud.
◆ Today’s session invites children to explore Jesus’ affirmation of life forever with God.

Question of the Week
In what ways do you think the next world will be different from this one?

Core Session
◆ Getting Started
◆ Gospel Story: Alive with God
◆ Pictures of Heaven (optional: colored chalk or block crayons)
◆ Praying Together

Enrichment
◆ Discover the Good News
◆ Singing Together
◆ Creative Movement: Angel Dance
◆ Game: Go with the Angel
◆ Info: Art and Artist
◆ Info: Young Children and the Gospel
◆ Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
◆ More About Today’s Scriptures
◆ Reflection
◆ The Scriptures and the Catechism
◆ The World of the Bible: Sadducees
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)

Children talk about what they think happens when we die. The purpose of this activity is not to impose one point of view on the children, but to give them a chance to hear and share diverse viewpoints about an important subject.

Sit with the children in a circle. Ask:

- What do you think happens when we die?
- What does heaven mean to you?

Allow time for each child who wants to talk to do so. We affirm our children’s viewpoints—without agreeing or disagreeing—when we say, “So you think that...” Be careful to repeat the child’s meaning; even using the same words is preferable to “editing” a remark to reflect a different meaning.

Display Fra Angelico’s Dance of the Angels and the Just in Paradise, attached to this document. Explain:

- This picture shows one person’s ideas about heaven. What do you see in this picture?
- What do you like about this picture? (Continue to affirm the many different points of view people have about death and heaven.)
- The artist put angels in his picture, too. Angels are not people who have died. They are special servants of God.

After children have had a chance to say and hear different viewpoints, explain that today’s story tells what Jesus thinks happens when we die.

**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

*Alive with God*

*Story Focus: Place Fra Angelico’s Dance of the Angels and the Just in Paradise, attached to this document, in the center of the story circle.*

Many, many people followed Jesus wherever he went. They loved to see him heal sick people. They loved to ask him questions. “Teacher,” they would say, “Tell us about God.” “Teacher,” they would say, “Tell us what happens when we die.”

“You will be like the angels,” answered Jesus. “You will come to new life and never die again.

The angels and you will live forever with God.” Someone in the crowd said, “Teacher, many, many years ago Moses died. Is he with God?”

“Yes,” said Jesus. “All who have died are with God.”

“But we don’t believe that people live again after they die,” another person said.

And Jesus answered, “Even when we die on earth, we are alive with God!”

**Pictures of Heaven** (5-15 minutes)

Children respond to today’s story by drawing pictures of heaven. We suggest block crayons or colored chalk to enable children to draw with broad sweeps of color.

Set the materials on a work surface. Remind the children that Jesus says that we will live in heaven with God. Ask the children to draw pictures of heaven. Assure children that no one knows what heaven is like. However they want to draw heaven is fine.

When children are finished, invite volunteers to show their pictures. You can help children tell stories about their pictures with such questions as, “Can you tell us about your picture?” or “What would you like to say about your picture?” Don’t insist on answers; for many children—as for many artists—the picture itself is the answer.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Place Fra Angelico’s painting, attached to this document, in the prayer corner. Invite children to look at the picture again as you explain:

- We have talked about death, heaven and angels today.
- Let’s sit quietly for a minute and think about all we have heard today.

With or without the poster, lead the children in 1 minute of silent prayer. Then ask the children what they would like to say to God today. After their words, close by praying:

- Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to tell us about life with you. Thank you for keeping us safe with you forever. Amen.

*Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to group members as they depart (or e-mail it to families after the session).*
Discover the Good News

5-10 minutes
On page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find an illustrated version of today’s story to share with the children.

On page 2 of Discover the Good News you’ll find directions for making a tissue-paper angel. You could do this together as a group, or children could lead family members in creating angels at home.

Singing Together

5-10 minutes
From Singing the Good News, sing together:

◆ “New Life” (songbook p. 14, also available as an MP3)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

Creative Movement

10-15 minutes
Angel Dance
Children invent movements to a dance that honors the angels in heaven.

Remind children that Jesus said we would live with the angels. (Be careful with your wording; many children—and not a few adults—believe that we become angels when we die. This is not the teaching of scripture.)

Invite children to invent a dance that honors the angels in heaven. Stand in a circle with the children. Teach them to sing these words to the tune of “The More We Get Together” or “Did You Ever See a Lassie?":

The angels are together, together, together.
The angels are together, together with God,Forever, together,Forever, together,
The angels are together, together with God.

Game

5-15 minutes
Go with the Angel
Ask the children to form a line facing you. When you call out a command, the children do what you call out until you choose a new command.

Sample commands:

◆ Angels, jump!
◆ Angels, clap!
◆ Angels, stamp your feet!

After several tries, invite children to take turns leading the game.
Art and Artist

The artist we know as Fra Angelico was born in Italy as Guido di Pietro toward the end of the 14th century. When he became a Dominican friar, he took the name Giovanni. Fra was the title of Italian Dominican friars, from the word frater for “brother.” Angelico, however, was the nickname given Fra Giovanni for the angelic quality of his paintings. Popular acclaim soon added to his name the title Il Beato, “the blessed.”

Fra Angelico’s paintings bring to the full canvas the luminous vision of medieval illuminated manuscripts. He retains their childlike charm yet brings a sense of harmony and unity that will find full expression in the paintings of the Renaissance.

This detail used in today’s session is titled Dance of the Angels and the Just in Paradise (attached to this document) and is from a larger painting called The Last Judgment. In the full painting, God sits in judgment at top and center. To the right are the condemned, on their way to hell. On the left are the blessed, entering heaven.

A work like Fra Angelico’s can be in itself a subject for contemplation. Try looking at the picture in silence for a leisurely length of time:

◆ What colors do you see?
◆ If you were describing the colors to someone else, to what would you compare each one?
◆ What expressions do you see?
◆ What shapes does each body or face or hand have?
◆ Where does your eye go in the picture?
◆ What does that point of the picture say to you?

Young Children and the Gospel

In today’s session you are asked to discuss death with the children. This seems a complex task, but a simple, truthful explanation is usually best for preschoolers. Some of the children will have had experience with death, if a member of the family has died. Others may have only experienced death if a pet has died. And others will only have heard adults or other children talk about death.

In today’s story, Jesus tells the Sadducees in simple terms that God is God of the living and that to God, we are all alive. Follow the example of Jesus—wait for the children’s questions and give short answers. And do not be afraid to tell them that you do not know an answer or that death remains something of a mystery to us.

Where You’ll Find Everything Else

◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  — Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today's Scriptures.
  — A printable version of today’s Gospel Story for use at home (to distribute or e-mail to families).
  — Directions for an alternative activity—Angels Mobile—creating tissue paper angels and hanging them together as a mobile.
  — Instructions for playing a game related to today’s story called Go with the Angel.
  — A full page sheet, titled Angel Dance Lyrics, with the words to the song from the Creative Movement activity.
  — Angelico’s “Dance of the Angels and the Just in Paradise,” to be used in today’s Gospel Story and Praying Together. It is also referenced in the Info article Art and Artist.
  — A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.

◆ Open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Fall-C’s Models of the Faith.
  — A helpful article for catechists on viewing and discussing art titled First Impressions.
  — An article suggesting a variety of ways of Reaching Out Beyond Your Church.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings affirm the reality of eternal, resurrected life. In the story from 2 Maccabees, seven brothers valiantly surrender their lives in hope of the resurrection. Paul takes comfort and courage knowing that God guards us—eternally—against the evil one. In the gospel, Jesus corrects the Sadducees and affirms the teaching of life after death.

2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
This second book of Maccabees recounts much of the same content found in 1 Maccabees 1–8. This book, however, has an elegant literary structure and presents history from a more theological perspective. Both books tell of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, his persecution and oppression of the Jewish people, and the Jewish resistance led by Mattathias, a priest, and his five sons (c. 175–164 BCE).

The author gives numerous vignettes of the courage with which many of the Jews faced martyrdom. In chapter 7, we read of a woman and her seven sons who were brought before their persecutors. Antiochus, in his mad bent to eradicate Judaism, had demanded that the Jews demonstrate their allegiance to him by eating food prohibited by Mosaic law.

The seven brothers choose nobly and courageously to suffer unspeakable tortures rather than reject God’s laws. They firmly believe that ultimately God will establish justice: they will find “renewal of life” (v. 9), resurrection, but their persecutors will find only humiliation and death.

2 Thessalonians 2:16–3:5
Paul first gives thanks for God’s choice of believers. He then encourages his readers to steadfastness. He prays for their continued encouragement and asks them to pray for his continued success and protection.

Paul returns to his prayer, directing hearts “to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ” (v. 5). This may be understood grammatically either as “to [your] love toward God and to [your] patient expectation of Christ” or as “to God’s love [for you] and Christ’s patient endurance” (as example).

The Sadducees accepted as binding only the written Torah (the first five biblical books) and thus rejected doctrines not taught therein (the resurrection, angels, demons), opposing the Pharisees, who also accepted the oral torah (the traditional teachings of the rabbis).

The levirate marriage law (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), on which the Sadducees base their test case, was a means to ensure the continuation of the family name. They attempted to show that belief in the resurrection as a continuation of this life leads to an absurd conclusion.

Jesus declares that the resurrection life is quite another matter. In the resurrection, the faithful attain the status of the angels as children of God. Marriage as a means of procreation is no longer necessary; personal relationships are based upon relationship to God.

Jesus then turns to a text (Exodus 3:6) that comes from the part of the Bible that the Sadducees accepted. God’s desire to commune with individuals cannot be thwarted by death, for “he is God not of the dead, but of the living” (v. 38). The very nature of God indicates that our relationship to God is not ended by death.
Reflection
Some strange quirk of human nature must enjoy the Trivial Pursuit of theology. In today’s gospel, the Sadducees cook up a bizarre scenario to tease out Jesus’ response. Those of us who were rascally children will recognize the ploy: question the adult convictions long enough, and forestall bedtime—or an imminent exam!

To their credit, the Sadducees had some basis. They didn’t believe in the Resurrection because it wasn’t recorded in the Pentateuch. Their scenario was designed to reveal the absurdity of belief in an afterlife.

Unfortunately, it also reveals the shallowness of their thinking. They dismiss an idea because they can’t imagine a world beyond the familiar one nor anything larger than their own laws. They reduce a belief which has become absolutely essential to a trivial argument.

It would be understandable if Jesus thwacked them, or even ridiculed them. But his response is masterful, inviting them to the same plane where he resides. He carries within him always the hopeful vision of a living God, who cares desperately for those God has created. To the string of names which his audience would find important (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) we could add our own list of parents, grandparents or friends who have revealed to us the face of the living God.

The Scriptures and the Catechism
Today we renew our hope for life everlasting in heaven with God (CCC, #1020–37). Our idea of eternal life hinges on our experiences here on earth. Jesus reveals that life with God will be very different in ways that we cannot now imagine. We also recall that our hope for eternal life must be lived out in our present life. We have been given the task of witnessing (the Greek word is martyr) to the truth of the gospel with our words and if necessary with our lives (CCC, #2471–74). For most of us, though, our martyrdom or witness is the daily struggle to live our lives according to the vision and values that Jesus exemplifies. Our conversion is an experience of being broken so that God can enter. This daily death to ourselves and to our sinfulness is the challenge of our lifelong Christian conversion.

The World of the Bible
Sadducees
The Sadducees were a small religious group or party within Judaism during the first and second centuries BCE and the first century CE. Drawn from the priestly and higher social classes, many Sadducees were members of the Sanhedrin—the chief judicial council.

They urged peaceful collaboration with the Romans, who occupied Palestine. Because of their concern for the temple as the religious and financial center for Judaism, they were often accused of undesirable compromises in order to retain their power. They disappeared as a group in 70 CE when Jerusalem was sacked by the Roman armies and the temple destroyed.

The source of the name Sadducee is uncertain. The most probable is from the word Zadokite, meaning a descendent of Zadok, a priest under Solomon. Other scholars think the name may come from the Hebrew saddik, meaning righteous.

Conservative in both politics and religion, they accepted as binding only the first five books of the Old Testament, the written Torah or Law of Moses. They rejected the Pharisees’ adoption of the orally transmitted traditions of the elders. Their beliefs were limited to those supported by the written Torah.

They denied the resurrection of the dead and the reality of angels and spirits, holding to no messianic doctrine unless it was a belief in a priestly Messiah. They stood in opposition to the scribes and Pharisees, defending the prerogatives of the temple and the priests while remaining aloof from the common people. The Sadducees persecuted followers of Christ and seem to have instigated the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:54-60).