Faith and Doubt

Jesus blesses those who, like us, believe without seeing.

♦ Good news! Jesus is risen. Jesus reveals his resurrected life to the women who come to the tomb, to the disciples gathered in a room and to Thomas, who needs to touch Jesus himself to believe.
♦ Like Thomas, young children rely on their senses to learn about the world. Like Jesus, we meet their needs when we provide plenty of activities that help them touch, move and create.
♦ In today’s session we first celebrate the Easter good news of Jesus’ new life then explore the story of Thomas through touch, crafts and games.

Question of the Week
Today Jesus blesses doubt. What are you doubtful about?

Core Session
♦ Getting Started (white pillar candle; optional: tempera paint, decorating wax)
♦ Easter Story: Jesus Lives! (block of wood, stone, cloth)
♦ Easter Game: Egg Wobble (Easter egg)
♦ Praying Together

Enrichment
♦ Discover the Good News
♦ Singing Together
♦ Easter Play Center (Easter baskets, plastic eggs, Easter butterflies)
♦ Craft: Easter Baskets (egg cartons, hole punch, pipe cleaners, trim)
♦ Craft: Creamy Egg Candies (powdered milk, cream cheese, shredded coconut, bowl, spoons)
♦ Egg Games: (Easter eggs, spoon)
♦ 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
♦ Using Dramatic Arts To Bring Different Age Groups Together
♦ The World of the Bible: Mercy
Getting Started (5-15 minutes)
If time allows, set up the Play Center described on page 3. Invite children as they arrive to explore the center together. Then gather children around a white pillar candle. You can first invite children to decorate the candle or simply talk together about Easter and light the candle.

You can mix tempera paint with tacky glue to decorate the candle, but you and the children might especially enjoy working with thin, colorful sheets of decorating beeswax. Young children can tear or cut tiny shapes from the wax and press the shapes directly onto the candle.

Invite children to help you decorate the candles—each child can add a splash of color with paint or beeswax. Light the candle and say:

◆ We will light this candle each Sunday of Easter.
◆ Each Sunday of Easter we can also tell one another this Easter message: Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen! (Encourage the children to join you in saying the Easter message.)

Story (5-10 minutes)
Easter
Note: Because most churches have no religious education on Easter Sunday, we begin with the Easter story. If time allows, you can immediately follow this story with today’s Gospel story of Thomas, attached to this document.

Jesus Lives!
Story Focus: Much of today’s session will focus on Thomas, who needed to touch the risen Jesus before believing in him. As you tell today’s story, encourage the children to touch objects that illustrate it.

(Pass around the wood.) Soldiers took wood and made a cross. Jesus died on the wood of the cross.

The friends of Jesus cried. They took the body of Jesus down from the cross. They wrapped him in cloth. (Pass around a cloth bandage or strip of cloth.)

The friends of Jesus laid him in a tomb made of stone. (Pass around the stone.) Jesus lay dead in the tomb of stone one day, two days, three days.

Two women came to the tomb. An angel was there, sitting outside the tomb. The angel said, “Jesus isn’t here. Come and see.”

The women looked inside the stone tomb. Jesus was gone!

“He is risen,” said the angel. “Go tell his other friends.”

The women went running, when who did they see but—Jesus! “Peace be with you,” said Jesus. “Go and tell the others that I am alive.”

The women dashed away again. “Alleluia!” cried the women. “Jesus is risen! (Encourage children to join you in these words.) We’ve seen him! He’s alive!”

Easter Game (10-20 minutes)
Egg Wobble
Children use Easter eggs to play a game based on today’s story. You’ll find more Easter Egg Games on page 4.

Sit with the children in a circle. Roll an egg to a child as you say, “Alleluia!”—the oval shape will cause the egg to take a wobbly path. Ask the child who catches the egg to finish the phrase by saying, “Jesus (or Christ) is risen!” This child then continues the game by saying, “Alleluia!” and rolling the egg to another child.

Praying Together (5 minutes)
Gather the children in a circle around the Easter candle used in today’s Getting Started activity. Light the candle. Turn to a child next to you, hold out your hands and say:

◆ Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen!

Let the child choose whether to touch your hands, hug you or simply say the words. Help the children pass the message (and hugs, if they like) around the circle.

Note: If you use At Home with the Good News, distribute this week’s paper to the children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.
Discover the Good News  
(5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a simple version of today’s gospel story. You will also find appealing bugs and animals with “Hug me!” messages. These are for the children to take home to use with their families.

Singing Together  
(5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Mary, Mary” (chorus only; p. 39 of the songbook, also available as an MP3)
◆ “Rejoice! Jesus Lives!” (p. 41 of the songbook)

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

Play Center  
(10-15 minutes)
Easter
Activity Soundtrack: Play Mussorgsky’s triumphant “The Great Gate of Kiev.” (Open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Children explore materials used in our celebration of Easter. Some churches now use an Easter garden as a counterpart to the Nativity crèche. This set of play materials consists of a model tomb, a figure of Jesus, an angel and several of Jesus’ followers. You’ll find directions for making Easter butterflies in the session for Passion (Palm) Sunday on page 2.

Place one or more baskets, colorful plastic eggs, the Easter Garden and butterflies in a corner of the room, perhaps arranging them on a brightly colored cloth. Include the white pillar candle used in today’s Getting Started activity, too.

Craft  
(10-20 minutes)
Easter Baskets
Invite children to make miniature Easter baskets.
Cut individual cups from the egg carton, making one cup per child. Show how to punch two holes opposite each other near the rim of a cup. Push a 6” piece of pipe cleaner through the holes to make a handle. Twist the ends to secure the handle in place.

Children can decorate their baskets with ribbons, tiny dried flowers, confetti or torn tissue shapes. These decorations can be tied to the baskets, glued to the baskets or used as a lining for the bottom of the basket.

Each child could put one or two creamy egg candies into his or her basket to take home. (See below.) The other candies can be enjoyed as an in-session snack.

Craft  
(10-20 minutes)
Creamy Egg Candies
Making candy eggs, a tangible symbol of Easter for young children, is one way to emphasize that our Easter celebration continues.

Place equal amounts of dry milk and cream cheese in a mixing bowl. (Start with ¾ cup of each; 6 ounces of cream cheese equals ¾ cup. If you want a sweeter candy, substitute a few spoons of confectioners’ sugar for a few spoons of dried milk.) Invite children to take turns mashing and squashing the ingredients together to make a well-blended, sticky paste. Put the shredded coconut in the shallow bowl. Show children how to shape a small egg from the creamy mixture and roll it in the coconut.

As the children work, invite them to share stories about their Easter celebration—egg hunts, Easter baskets, visits from relatives, etc. Tell the children how you spent Easter Sunday, too. Point out that we are still celebrating the Easter season today.
**Egg Games** (10-15 minutes each)

**Egg Hunt**
Children use Easter eggs to play a game based on the Easter message:

- **Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen!**

**Note:** If children will hear the refrain *Christ is risen!* during your church’s worship or fellowship time, we recommend you use that phrase. Otherwise use the phrase from today’s story: *Jesus is risen!*

Encourage children to find eggs you have hidden around the room and bring them to a communal basket.

Whenever a child delivers an egg, greet that child with the Easter message:

- **Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen!**

**Egg Roll**
Children use Easter eggs to play a game based on the Easter message:

- **Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen!**

Use the masking tape to make an X in the center of your floor. Position the children around the edges of the room. When you give the signal, the children use the spoons to roll the eggs to the X. When all the children reach the X, everyone calls out together the Easter message:

- **Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen!**

If your room is small, you may prefer to set up a course that goes from one corner to the other.

**Egg Pass**
Children use Easter eggs to play a game based on the Easter message:

- **Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen!**

Sit together with the children in a circle. Play music while the children pass around an egg. When the music stops, the child holding the egg says:

- **Alleluia! Jesus (or Christ) is risen!**

The other children can respond by cheering. If your music player is easy to operate, let children take turns playing and stopping the music.

**Young Children and the Gospel**

Since children are not usually in church school on Easter Sunday, plan to explore the story of this central feast of the Christian year today. Our session links accounts from two gospels, telling of Jesus’ resurrection and an appearance to his disciples, including Thomas.

Our Easter sessions are designed to show children that the celebration of Easter continues for 50 days, up to and including the feast of Pentecost.

**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 one-page story script for telling today’s *Gospel Story: Thomas, Jesus Lives!*
  - An alternative story-review *Circle Game.*
  - 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 Spring-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Spring-A’s *Models of the Faith.*
  - A printable article for catechists and/or families exploring *Keeping Easter.*
  - A printable article for catechists titled *First Impressions,* which offers practical helps for experiencing and teaching about fine art.
  - The *Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten* for *Living the Good News.*

© 2017 Published by Morehouse Education Resources, www.ChurchPublishing.org. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted to reproduce this page for use in the purchasing congregation only.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings call us to faith in the risen Christ. The reading from Acts tells how faith in the resurrected Jesus empowers the fledgling community of believers. Peter sees faith in and love for Christ as a sign of our salvation. In the gospel, Jesus does not leave Thomas behind, but rewards his persistence with faith.

Acts 2:42-47

In the Easter season, following an ancient tradition, a reading from the Acts of the Apostles is used as the first reading. Today’s reading is the first of the major summaries to link together the specific events and teachings of Luke’s narrative. These verses give an overview of the Church’s life and growth.

Verse 42 mentions four aspects of that life. The “apostles’ teaching” was carried on both in public and within the community. Likewise the community continued to offer “the prayers” both at the temple and in the community.

The “fellowship” (Greek, koinonia) was apparent especially in the sharing of resources. This probably meant not an automatic divestiture of all possessions, but the placing of one’s assets at the disposal of the community to be used as needed. The “breaking of the bread” probably indicates a common meal that included the Lord’s Supper at which the table-fellowship of the apostles with the risen Lord was extended to the community.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Throughout the Easter season, the second reading is taken from 1 Peter, written to the Christians of Asia Minor who were facing persecution for their faith. The bulk of 1 Peter is not like a letter in form or style, but more like a sermon given at a baptism. Some scholars have even suggested that it might be a text for the Easter baptismal liturgy.

Today’s reading is a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s offering to believers a rebirth and new life through the resurrection of Jesus. This life is lived in the hope of an inheritance “kept in heaven” (v. 4). Even now Christians are guarded in their trials, sustained by their faith in Jesus, even though they have never seen him.

John 20:19-31

The first appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples stresses Jesus’ fulfillment of the promises that he made in the great farewell address in chapters 14–17.

Thomas will not accept the Easter proclamation on the word of others but wishes to experience the risen Christ directly. Yet he can still penetrate the meaning behind the marvel and make a full affirmation of Christian faith. He consummates the sequence of titles given to Jesus throughout the gospel by giving him the ultimate title, God.

Verses 30-31 serve as a conclusion to the gospel. They evaluate the content of the gospel, inviting all to understand the meaning of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and, through belief, to share in a saving relationship with him.

Reflection

One would expect trumpets, lilies and glory on the first Sunday after Easter, but no. Today’s gospel shows that the road won’t be easy and the story won’t end. Jesus’ reunion with his friends isn’t the triumph we might expect, but is marred by Thomas’ doubt. His confession “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28) is pulled from him only after blatant proof, and Jesus’ rhetorical question, “Have you believed because you saw me?” (John 20:29) carries a hint of sarcasm.

Many scholars consider John 21 an epilogue, making this chapter the ending. Does it seem unsatisfying?

Perhaps it is hopeful, nudging the door open a crack for those who come later, entertaining doubt. Maybe it says, if Thomas can convert, anyone can! As L. William Countryman writes in The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel, “One does not have to be the perfect mystic to be accepted among the circle of disciples. Even Thomas can still qualify; indeed Jesus will make special concessions to confirm his faltering belief” (p. 136).

This final chapter encourages us, then, to bring along our doubts in our backpacks and continue along the unending road. Jesus beckons us to come.
The Scriptures and the Catechism
Both as a community and as individuals, Christians live anew through God's gift of the Holy Spirit (CCC, #733–41). The Spirit's presence is most evident in the experience of the forgiveness of sins (CCC, #1441–45). Through the Spirit who lives in us, our Christian lives become an adventure in continual forgiveness as we realize Jesus’ dream for the kingdom community.

Using Dramatic Arts To Bring Different Age Groups Together
by Linda Ashe-Ford
The arts provide a wonderful opportunity to bring children, teens and adults together to celebrate the glory of the Lord. With some advanced planning and a little help from seasoned craft people and musicians in your church, you can plan activities that are easy and appealing to all ages and skill levels.

Do most of the prep work in advance so that the day of the activity is a time for fun, fellowship and sharing. Keep the activities open-ended and easy to do. Try to plan things that can be done either by a group or by individuals contributing to a larger project. If your activity will produce an end product, be sure to celebrate by having the fruit of your labor blessed and/or used in a service shortly after completion. Here are two activities that you can use to enliven any gathering.

Bible Verse Pantomime
Music and drama bring different ages together for fun and fellowship. Put verses on slips of paper before the event. Ask your church musicians to think of familiar songs and hymns that would act as clues to what the verse might be.

At the event organize the people into small groups, being sure that each group includes adults, teens and children. Give each group a verse to silently act out as the hymn is played. Everyone else tries to guess what the verse is about. This quick and easy game includes everyone, young and old, and usually ends with everyone laughing. Singing together a favorite hymn can round out the night.

Storytelling
Storytelling is another way to bring different ages together. Ask older members of your church to share stories of their faith journey or the history of your church with the children in your faith formation programs.

Ask storytellers to bring pictures or artifacts that help tell the story. Start by showing these to focus everyone's attention. You can also ask children to tell each other short stories of faith that are important to them.

Also consider taping the stories or asking older children to document the stories by taking pictures and interviewing the storyteller afterwards. Teens may even be interested in making video or PowerPoint presentations of the stories you collect. Once you have a collection of stories, compile them into a book that tells the history of your faith community.

Producing the book can be as simple as making photocopies and putting them in binders, or as easy as taking the compiled stories and pictures to a local copy store to have them copied and bound. Often church members will buy copies for their personal use.

The World of the Bible
Mercy
In the Old Testament, mercy usually identifies a complex Hebrew idea that describes God's special covenant love. God's attitude of love or attachment to the covenant partners includes aspects of loyalty, dependability, trustworthiness and an eagerness to help when situations turn bad.

Like the Head/Father/Patron of a family, God is an especially generous benefactor who lavishes gifts (Greek: charis, Latin: gratia) on them. These are not distributed because of the people's merits, but strictly out of God's favor or mercy. Mercy is not just the response felt toward those who are suffering, but even more the fierce attachment of God to be with us and save us.

Paul echoes this fierce fidelity by describing God's eagerness to rescue or save us when we were alienated by sin. God's desire to be in relationship with us keeps God alert to our cries for help and eager to deliver us from what separates us from God.