Christ Among Us

The risen Christ stands among us.
- Jesus again appears to his disciples and again invites them to touch his risen body, and believe in his risen life.
- Once more we invite young children to participate in a hands-on “please touch” celebration of the Easter message.
- In today’s session, we explore the gospel story and continue a series of optional activities designed to help children explore Holy Communion.

Question of the Week
When does Jesus seem closest to you? When does he seem farthest away?
Getting Started (10-15 minutes)

Children use their sense of touch as a preparation for hearing today's story.

Sit with the children in a circle. Bring out a basket or box of items with assorted tactile qualities: cloth such as velvet or burlap, sandpaper, plastic or vinyl items, papery onion skin, bark, balls of yarn, etc. Invite a volunteer to close his or her eyes. Ask the volunteer to pick one item from the basket or box. Encourage the volunteer to touch the item in many ways; for example, children can rub a ball of yarn against a cheek or stroke it.

Ask the other children not to name the item being handled. The volunteer need not guess the name of the object, but can simply explore it anyway he or she chooses. Invite other volunteers, one at a time, to explore new items. Close by saying:

◆ We can touch and feel many things.

Someone special in today’s story says, “Touch me!” Listen and find out who.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Jesus Is Really Here!

Story Focus: Let children participate in the story as indicated. Have available a small plate with such snack items as apple slices.

Jesus’ friends feel sad because Jesus is no longer with them.

Suddenly Jesus is with them! (Encourage children to greet Jesus.)

Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid. Peace be with you.” “Jesus, is it really you?” says one friend.

Another friend says, “Maybe it isn’t really Jesus. Maybe it’s a ghost!”

A ghost! Some of the friends are afraid.

Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid. Touch me and feel that I am real.” (Invite children to touch each other’s hands.)

Then Jesus says, “Do you have anything to eat? I’m hungry.” They give him some fish to eat. (Pass around the plate of food for the children to share.)

The friends can touch Jesus. The friends can share food with Jesus.

“Jesus, it’s really you!” the friends shout. “You’re really alive!”

Craft (10-20 minutes)

Touch Collage

Children continue the theme of “please touch” by making a collage with textured materials. Ask:

◆ Who said “Touch me” in today’s story? (Jesus)
◆ Let’s make a poster with many things to touch.

Lay the poster board on a table or floor. Set assorted tactile collage materials nearby: textured cloths (corduroy, velvet, felt, burlap, wool), sandpaper, pasta shapes, foil scraps, yarn, etc. Also make available scissors, glue and poster board. Invite the children to work together to make a texture collage, gluing the various materials to the poster in any pattern the children choose. Encourage children as they work to enjoy the feel of the various materials. Let the finished poster dry. Children can enjoy using this poster as a free-play activity in future sessions.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Gather children in the area used as a prayer corner throughout Lent. Invite the children to decorate the prayer corner for Easter. (Although the liturgical color for Easter is white, children are more likely to perceive an assortment of brightly colored cloths as festive.)

Help the children include an open Bible and candles in the prayer corner. Explain that during this time of the year—Easter time—we use in our prayer the word, alleluia, which means “Praise God!”

Encourage children to join you in calling out alleluia several times. Pray:

◆ Thank you, God, for giving Jesus new life. Alleluia!
◆ Thank you, Jesus, for being with us and for asking us to touch. Alleluia!
◆ Thank you, God, for so many things... (Encourage children to offer their own thanksgivings. Help children respond to each prayer by calling out alleluia!)
◆ Thank you, God, for each child here. (Name each child, helping children respond with the call alleluia after each name.)

Note: Distribute this week’s Discover the Good News to children after the session.
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)
In today's Discover the Good News you'll find an illustrated version of today's story. Invite children to find the pictures that match the parts of the story. Children will also find an Easter Balloons activity. If possible, invite one or more helpers to do this activity with the children.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
- “Easter Lullaby” (p. 35 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)
- “Celebrate Life” (p. 36 in the songbook)
- “God’s Alive” (p. 40 in the songbook; also available as an MP3)
- “Jesus Says to Us” (p. 46 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)

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

Craft (10-15 minutes)
Easter Tambourines
Children decorate Easter tambourines. Use the tambourines in today’s Easter Games and Dance movement activity.

Explain:
- We still celebrate Easter today.
- We celebrate because Jesus is alive. Jesus is risen.

Distribute the paper plates. Invite children to use felt pens or crayons to decorate the tambourines. Children can also cut and glue shapes or scraps of construction paper to the plates.

For each tambourine, put a handful of beans, macaroni or gravel on one plate. Lay a second plate face down over the first plate. Tape or staple edges together. Invite children to glue or tape ribbon or crepe paper streamers to the edges of the finished tambourines.

Teach children this simplified version of the traditional Easter Greeting:

**Greeter:** Alleluia! Jesus is risen.
**Children:** Jesus is risen. Alleluia!

Encourage children to repeat the greeting several times, shaking their tambourines as they call out the words. Children will use the tambourines again in today's Easter Games and Dance activity before taking them home.

Note: This Easter Greeting is found in the traditions and liturgies of many denominations. Using this greeting throughout the season of Easter will help children begin to perceive Easter as a season of celebration rather than a single feast day.

Movement (10-15 minutes)
Easter Games and Dance
Activity Soundtrack: Play “Jabulani Africa.” (Open your Spring-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.) This lovely African gospel song invites people to rejoice in the risen Jesus. The Zulu word jabulani means “rejoice.” The song is performed by the African Children's Choir. You can learn more about them at http://www.africanchildrenschoir.com.

As in the 2nd Sunday of Easter, Children hunt for Jesus and greet him with an Easter cheer. Choose the option that best suits your situation. We also provide an optional dance activity to follow the game.

**Option 1:** This option works best outdoors or in a large room. Choose one child to be Jesus. The other children will be the friends of Jesus. Jesus hides and the other children hunt for him. When one child calls out, “I've found Jesus,” everyone shouts, “Jesus is risen! Alleluia!” Let the children take turns being Jesus.

**Option 2:** This option works well in a small room. One child hides a small picture or statue of Jesus. The other children hunt for the picture. When Jesus is found, everyone claps and says, “Jesus is risen! Alleluia!”
You can also invite children to dance to the festive drum music recommended on the Activity Soundtrack above. Help them identify the qualities of the music that inspire different music. Turn off the music. Ask them to show you fast movements, then slow movements.

Turn the music back on. Ask, “What goes best with this music? Should we make fast moves or slow moves?” Allow children different answers, and invite them to show the moves they can make to the music. Explain that this music is called “festive,” that is, music suited for a feast. Today we still celebrate the festive season of Easter. Invite the children to dance in honor of the festive season of Easter. Encourage children to use the Easter Tambourines made in the activity above to shake as they dance to the music.

After 10-15 minutes of play, celebrate finding Jesus with a snack of apple slices or raisins and juice.

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**Play Dough and Modeling Clay Recipes**

Preschoolers and kindergartners long to touch and explore. Today’s session invites them to do just that as they explore the gospel story and continue their celebration of Easter. To further extend the theme of today’s session, you might offer modeling materials for free play. Here are two simple recipes:

**Play Dough**

Mix together 1½ cups flour, ½ cup salt, ½ cup water and ¼ cup oil. Knead well. Use a few drops of food coloring to tint the play dough. Store in plastic containers.

**Cornstarch Clay**

Mix together in a saucepan 1 cup corn starch, 2 cups baking soda and 1⅓ cups water. Bring the mixture to a bubbling stage over medium heat. Cook and stir until it thickens; it will look like dry mashed potatoes. Allow to cool slightly, then knead.

You can also tint this dough with a few drops of food coloring. Finished shapes can be air dried and painted. Although this clay can also be dried in a low oven, air-drying works more reliably for uneven shapes.

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**Young Children and the Gospel**

In today’s gospel, Jesus appears to the disciples, who first doubt his presence. Jesus invites them to touch him and share food with him. When they do, they realize the truth: this is no ghost, but their risen Lord.

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**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 shareable story script of today’s *Gospel Story: Jesus Is Really Here!*
  - An optional *Mass Play* activity.
  - An optional *Movement Activity* called Touch Tour.
  - This week’s *At Home with the Good News*, to distribute or email to group members after the session.

- Open your Spring-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Spring-B’s *Models of the Faith*.
  - For catechists and/or families, an article titled *Easter tide: The Great Fifty Days*.
  - For catechists and/or families, an article titled *The Great Vigil of Easter*. 
More about Today Scriptures

Today’s scriptures proclaim that Jesus is risen and present with us. In Acts, Peter preaches about the power of God in Jesus and calls his listeners to respond with repentance and conversion. John assures us that Jesus intercedes for us, removing our sin and calling us to the obedience of love. In today’s gospel, Jesus invites the disciples to touch his risen body and to understand the meaning of the scriptures.


The book of the Acts of the Apostles recounts the early growth of the Christian Church. One of the major features of Acts is Luke’s use of speeches by principal figures to provide reflection upon and analysis of events. These speeches demonstrate the basic preaching pattern of the apostolic Church to different audiences as the Church moves from the Jewish to the Gentile world.

Today’s reading is taken from the second of these discourses, Peter’s temple sermon. Set in the context of a healing (3:1-10), it shows that Jesus’ ministry continues in the apostles. The sermon begins with the basic proclamation about Jesus’ death and resurrection. This kernel is then fleshed out in a longer section identifying Jesus with various Old Testament figures.

1 John 2:1-5a

John writes to encourage his readers to live without sin. Once baptized, no Christian should be able to live in ongoing, willful sin. Although Christians must constantly struggle to free themselves from a sinfulness that infects all humanity, God’s cleansing power is already at work.

Jesus is our advocate, the one who speaks for us and promises continuing forgiveness. The same word for advocate, parakletos, is used of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John (John 14:16).

Verse 2 stresses God’s impartiality and generous provision of forgiveness for all people. In the early Church, believers tended to concentrate on developing the new identity of their communities, focusing on the differences between “the world” and the fellowship of those in the faith. Here John reminds believers that “the whole world” (v. 2) benefits from Jesus’ work.

In verses 3-5, John links, as he does repeatedly through this letter, keeping God’s commandments and love. For him, the two are inseparable. Jesus alone perfectly combines these two virtues, thereby providing the model for every Christian.

Luke 24:35-48

Today’s reading of Jesus’ appearance to his disciples is paralleled by accounts in the other gospels and shares with them the characteristic elements of doubt, recognition and commission.

By showing the marks of the crucifixion, the risen Christ identifies himself as the earthly Jesus. He shows himself to be “really real,” not a vision or a ghost.

The account displays the Hebrew understanding of the person as particular and embodied, in contrast to the Greek sense of the person as merely the “soul.”

As in the Emmaus story, the disciples recognize Jesus in the context of a meal and in the exposition of the scriptures. The Hebrew scriptures are divided into three parts: the law, the prophets and the writings (the first book being the Psalms).

To the earlier statement that the scriptures told of the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah (24:25-27) is added that the scriptures also point toward the mission “to all nations” (v. 47). The accomplishment of Jesus’ mission to Israel means the beginning of his followers’ mission to the Gentiles.

Reflection

Today’s gospel defies all the self-help books about achieving inner peace. Peace is a gift, according to Luke. Furthermore, it comes unexpectedly, during confusion, mourning, fear and anxiety. The disciples find it too good to be true.

To alert them to reality, Jesus asks for something to eat. He reminds us of adolescents who are always hungry or long-awaited guests whom we welcome with a special meal. This touchstone in human nature apparently convinces the skeptical. Wisely, Jesus starts with bodily needs, then “opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (24:45).

How ironic that he tells the poor, uncertain, wavering crew: “You are witnesses of these things” (v. 48). They are hardly the finest spokespersons, but then, neither are we. We have the same mixture of doubt
and certainty, anxiety and joy that they had. Jesus always seems to choose the most unlikely prospects. As Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu says, “Our God is an expert at dealing with chaos, with brokenness, with all the worst that we can imagine.”

But to all, he extends the same invitation: “Touch me and see.” Only by coming dangerously close to this wounded Lord will we too know transformation of our wounds—and resurrection.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today we are reminded that the Risen Christ (CCC, #638–58) accompanies us on our journey of life as a hidden stranger. He reveals his presence among us in the understanding of scripture and the celebration of the Eucharist. His presence triggers our conversion to relate to him and to others in a more responsible way (CCC, #1430–39). Just as Jesus was the Mediator for humanity in relation to God for the forgiveness of sins (CCC, #456–60, 1544–46, 618, 2574), so we must be mediators of Jesus’ love in our behavior toward others.

Liturgy Link

Easter and the Book of Acts, Part 1

Following an ancient tradition, a reading from the Book of Acts replaces the Old Testament reading on Sundays during the season of Easter. This reminds us that the story of the people of God has now become the story of the Church. Because the Holy Spirit is prominent in Acts, this book also reminds us of the new creation that took place as the good news spread first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans and then to the ends of the earth.

Luke as Author

Linguistic, stylistic and theological considerations lead scholars to the widely accepted conclusion that Acts and the Gospel of Luke were written by the same author. Both books are anonymous, but internal evidence points to Greek authorship. Apparently, Luke was a Gentile who knew the Hebrew scriptures in their Greek translation.

The Acts of the Apostles singles out the deeds of Peter (chaps. 1–11) and Paul (chaps. 12–28) as examples of disciples who carry on Christ’s prophetic mission. Peter and Paul were executed in Rome in or near AD 67, and the Book of Acts was probably written between AD 70 and 90. Thus we have an account of the early years of the Church that is very close to the events it describes.

[Luke is] “committed to a perspective. He has included this material, excluded other; ‘ordered’ his account in this way, not in that. This is not a neutral, disinterested chronicle but a partisan narrative shaping of the story of Jesus. His aim is communicative in the sense of his purpose to engage his audience in discourse and so to shape them by his work.”

—Joel B. Green
The Theology of the Gospel of Luke

provides an introduction to the entire double volume work and is a statement of Luke’s intention for writing.

The World of the Bible

The Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms

This phrase summarizes the three general categories of Jewish sacred texts—the Jewish “scriptures”:

◆ The Law (Hebrew: Torah, instruction) consisted of the first five books of the Old Testament that tell of God’s search for an appropriate covenant partner.
◆ The Prophets (Hebrew: Nevi’im) collected the prophetic stories and God’s messages to the community.
◆ The Writings (Hebrew: Ketuvim) was a catch-all for everything else. It included the song book of the Psalms and wisdom writings that gave advice for living a happy and fulfilling life.

The first letter of each of these three categories in Hebrew—T-N-K—forms the acronym that identifies the name for the Jewish Scriptures: TaNaKh.