God assures us of God’s constant, shepherd-like care.
- Jesus assures us that he is the good shepherd, who knows each of us by name.
- The Good Shepherd is an image of Jesus with warm appeal to preschoolers and kindergartners.
- In today’s session, children explore this central gospel image and continue their celebration of Easter.

Question of the Week
Who cares for you like a shepherd? In what ways?

Core Session
- Getting Started (toy sheep or cotton balls)
- Gospel Story: Jesus Knows Me (shepherd from crèche set)
- Story-Review Game (blanket, pillow cases or cloths in neutral colors)
- Praying Together (white or colored cloths, Bible, candles)

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Tip: Sheep Pen (craft sticks, rubber bands)
- Journey Chart (stickers)
- Art (thin sponges, newspapers, smocks, paper towels, shallow flat pans, tempera paint)
- Book Corner: Sheep and Shepherds
- 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: The World

Scripture
John 10:11-18
**Getting Started** (10-15 minutes)

Children hunt for hidden sheep used in today’s story.

Before the session gather as many sheep as you can find from children’s toy farm sets or from Christmas crèche sets. As an alternative, simply use cotton balls to represent sheep. Hide the sheep around the room before the children arrive.

In the session gather the children around you. Explain:

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

Remind children of this simplified version of the traditional Easter Greeting:

*Greeter*: Alleluia! Jesus is risen.

*Children*: Jesus is risen. Alleluia!

Help children exchange the greeting with one another. Then talk briefly about sheep. Ask:

- What sounds does a sheep make?
- What colors are sheep? *(Sheep come in many shades of gray, tan, brown and black, in addition to white.)*

Explain:

- There are several sheep hidden around the room.
- We need to gather all the sheep before we can hear today’s story.

Help children to bring sheep to the storytelling area.

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

**Jesus Knows Me**

*Story Focus*: Use the toy sheep found in the Getting Started activity above as a focal point for today’s story. You can also use a shepherd figure from a crèche set and a sheep pen made from craft sticks, found in the Tip on page 3.

Here is the shepherd. *(Touch the shepherd figure.)* He loves his sheep. He calls his sheep by name.

“Good morning, Molly. Hello, Spot. Right this way, Flag. How are you today, Nanny? Did you have a good night’s sleep, Fluff?” *(Touch a different sheep as you say each name.)*

The shepherd watches his sheep all day long. At night, he brings each sheep safely inside their pen. *(One by one, place each sheep gently inside the sheep pen.)*

He is a good shepherd.

Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and love them.”

Jesus says to us, “I know each of you and love each of you.” *(Name each child.)*

Jesus is our good shepherd.

**After the Story**

Make the story materials available in a free-play center that the children may visit in twos or threes.

**Story-Review Game** (10-20 minutes)

**Jesus Knows Me**

Spread a blanket to serve as a sheep pen. Let the children take turns being the sheep, the good shepherd and the wolf. The sheep follow the shepherd; the shepherd cares for the sheep, chasing away the wolf as necessary.

You can slip the pillowcases or cloths over small children’s chairs to serve as extra sheep.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Gather children in the prayer corner used during 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 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 calling each of us by name. *(Name each child, helping children respond with the call alleluia after each name.)*
- Thank you, God, for so many things... *(Encourage children to offer their own thanksgivings. Help children respond to each prayer by calling out alleluia!)*

**Note**: Distribute this week’s Discover the Good News to 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 an illustrated version of today’s story. You’ll also find simple finger puppets children can use to re-enact today’s story. 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:
- “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.

Sheep Pen
All you need are craft sticks and rubber bands to make a set of moveable wooden fences that can be joined together to form a sheep pen. Children will enjoy playing with these in this and other sessions.

Directions:
- Make a stack of six to ten popsicle sticks.
- Pull out every other stick ½”. You should have a stack of sticks in which half the sticks extend to the left and half the sticks extend to the right.
- Use two rubber bands to secure the stack.
- Make at least five stacks. (The more stacks you make, the more choices the children can make as they build with the fences.)
- You can join the fences together into a sheep pen by interlacing fences at the ends.
- Form the joined fences into a sheep pen or other shape.

Journey Chart (10-15 minutes)
A familiar metaphor for the Christian life is that of a journey. We make this metaphor concrete for preschoolers and kindergartners by introducing a Journey Chart that will be used throughout the sessions in Lent and Easter. Throughout the season, children can add stickers to the chart.

Find directions and sticker templates for this and other Journey Chart activities attached to this document. You will also find the Journey Chart itself attached to this document.

Post the chart at children’s eye level. Explain:
- We can pretend we are traveling together on this road.
- Each time we do a project together, we will add stickers to this chart.
- Today’s project is listening to our Good Shepherd.

Help children find a quiet way to sit. (The most effective way to accomplish this is to model a quiet, prayerful posture yourself.) Explain:
- There are many ways to listen to Jesus.
- Sometimes people hear a voice inside them when they listen to Jesus.
- Sometimes people only hear silence when they listen to Jesus.
- Today we will sit quietly for a minute and listen to Jesus. Whatever you hear or feel is fine.
- If you like, you can say Jesus’ name to yourself while you listen.

Pray silently for 1 minute. Then help each child choose a sticker to add to the chart. Save the chart to use in future sessions.
Art (10-20 minutes)

Sponge Print Sheep

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.

Children use sponge prints to make pictures of sheep in meadows. Use sharp scissors to cut sponges into sheep shapes. Find simple sheep shapes templates in various sizes attached to this document.

Protect the craft area with newspapers and the children with painting smocks. Make printing pads by folding a few paper towels in half and placing them in a flat pan. Saturate the paper towels with thin tempera paint.

Make at least one such pad for every three to four children. Help the children press the sponge shapes on the pads to print sheep on the light green construction paper. (Invite children to imagine bringing sheep into a green meadow.)

After the paint dries, invite children to use felt markers or crayons to add details, such as clumps of grass, colorful flowers or small animals to the pictures.

Book Corner

Sheep and Shepherds

In the absence of live sheep, you can share pictures of sheep from children’s books. We recommend:


◆ The Lord is My Shepherd illustrated by Anne Wilson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 2003). Fluid, colorful art integrated with a multicultural presentation makes this book a new treasure for sharing familiar and beloved scripture with young children in a thoroughly contemporary style.

INFO

Young Children and the Gospel

In today’s gospel, Jesus compares himself to a good shepherd and God’s people to sheep, who follow his voice.

For preschoolers and kindergartners we tell the story of a shepherd caring for his sheep and encourage imaginative play with the images of sheep and shepherd.

Few young children today have the knowledge and familiarity with sheep that Jesus’ listeners had. One Sunday in Easter, a teacher with a country home brought to her faith formation group one of her sheep, inviting the children to stroke its firm and waxy fur. Few churches could arrange this experience for their religious education programs, but if your church is one of them, the children will remember it all their lives!

INFO

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 Knows Me.
  — The Journey Chart to be used in the activity of the same name.
  — Three additional documents needed for the Journey Chart activity: Boy Girl Stickers, Jesus Stickers and Using Sticker Sheets.
  — An optional Mass Play activity.
  — A Sheep Pattern for use in today’s Art activity.
  — An optional Story-Review Game called Hear the Shepherd.
  — 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 Eastertide: The Great Fifty Days.
  — For catechists and/or families, an article titled The Passover: Old and New.

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More about Today Scriptures

Today’s readings assure us of God’s constant, shepherd-like care. In his sermon in Acts, Peter preaches that salvation is to be found in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified, but raised from death by God. The author of 1 John tells us that, because of God’s love shown in Jesus, we are now God’s children. In the gospel, Jesus explains how he, as our Good Shepherd, lays down his life because he cares for his sheep.

Acts 4:8-12

Peter and John’s arrest is instigated by the Sadducees, the Jewish group who accepted only the written law and rejected the oral tradition followed by the Pharisees. Thus they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees, however, believed in a future general resurrection, but Peter and John proclaim that this promised future resurrection is now a present and life-giving reality in Jesus.

The rulers, elders and scribes make up the members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish court responsible for internal affairs. The appearance of the apostles before this body parallels Jesus’ examination by the Sanhedrin. As Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit empowers the apostles to answer.

1 John 3:1-2

Today’s reading again takes up the theme of Christians and sin, this time in the context of their adoption as “children of God” (v. 1). This special relationship to God was formerly extended to Israel as a people and especially to the king as Israel’s representative. Here this intimate relationship is proclaimed as a present reality for all who believe that Jesus is the Christ.

In Hebrew idiom, “to be the child of” meant to exhibit the characteristics of one’s father. Christians are truly God’s children now, yet they are also still in the process of growing into resemblance to God by imitating Christ. Our resemblance to God is evidenced in the realm of behavior.

John 10:11-18

Today’s reading is the fourth of the great “I am” discourses. In the Old Testament the absolute statement “I am” is used as a formula of God’s self-revelation (Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:10-13). In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses it of himself in a similar way (6:20; 8:58; 13:19; 18:5).

From this usage, John develops the discourses using a predicate “I am” statement (bread of life, 6:35; light of the world, 8:12; door, 10:7; good shepherd, 10:11; resurrection and life, 11:25; way, truth and life, 14:6; true vine, 15:1) to show Jesus’ divinity and his relationship to humankind.

In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of Israel, as is David and the Davidic Messiah. Today’s reading develops the figure of the shepherd of the sheep. Jesus is “the good shepherd” (v. 11).

The word good (Greek, kalos) more literally means “beautiful,” as in an ideal of perfection. Here it might be rendered as model. Jesus is the model shepherd, both because of his willingness to lay down his life and because of his intimate knowledge of his flock.

The intimacy between the shepherd and his flock parallels that between the Father and the Son. The purpose of this mutual knowledge is to bring Jesus’ followers, both the flock of Israel and the Gentile flocks, into union with him and with one another.

Reflection

Good Shepherd Sunday rolls around again, and we dread being compared to sheep: wooly, stupid and directionally challenged.

So maybe we should focus instead on the shepherd: there are many reasons why he has been beloved for centuries. We who have grown overly cynical about leadership, given the disasters in church, state and corporate worlds, can find refreshment in this portrait.

In utter simplicity and without drawing attention to himself, this leader sacrifices his own life for his friends. He is confident and calm, nobly laying down his life. Although the thugs may seem to control him at his trial and crucifixion, he in reality is directing the order of events. Why? That seems a mystery, and is in fact the same question the poet Christina Rossetti asked: “Is one worth seeking, when Thou hast of Thine/Ninety and nine?”

Such dedication is beyond human comprehension, but hints of a supreme love.
The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today’s readings remind us that what happened to Jesus was the working out of God’s plan of salvation. God, the loving Father, desired to bring all humanity back into the right relationship as the new covenant community. Since God is our Father, we are God’s children (CCC, #39–43, 238–42, 370, 2779–93). This is the basic Christian vision that reveals how God sees our world and is also the reason for the respect and reverence owed to every other human person. Since we are God’s children, the Church can be aptly understood as the family of God (CCC, #1655–58, 759).

Liturgical Link

Easter and the Book of Acts Part 2

Purpose of Luke’s Writing

Employing sound scholarship, Luke attempted to present an accurate, ordered and reliable account. He tells of Jesus’ saving ministry and of how the Spirit of Jesus established and worked through the Church, beginning in Jerusalem and on to Rome, the capital of the empire. (See Luke 4:16–30 and Acts 1:8, the programmatic verses for the two volumes respectively.)

In addition to this overall purpose, Luke wanted to show that the formation and spread of the Church was the natural outgrowth of Jesus’ life and ministry and that Christianity was the continuation of Judaism. Luke saw in the Church the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation found in the Old Testament, and he wished to argue that Christianity should enjoy the same privilege of official recognition in the Roman Empire as did Judaism.

Rome considered Judaism a legal religion (religio licita). And although Jews were released from the Roman requirement of Caesar worship, Christians were not regarded as Jews and their loyalties to Christ as Lord could be perceived as a threat to the sovereignty of the Roman emperor. With the ever-present possibility of persecution, Luke attempted to make the statement that and Christians were not politically dangerous to the Roman authorities.

Yet another purpose of Luke’s double work was to proclaim that Jesus’ salvation is meant for Jew and Gentile. The theme of the universality of salvation flows through the gospel and Acts. The two volumes also are united by the activity of the Holy Spirit. More than any of the other evangelists of the Bible, Luke emphasized the importance and work of the Spirit as the initiator of the works of salvation history.

In Acts, Luke presented the Spirit as the active presence of Jesus in the Church. The Spirit empowered and directed the Church outward. It accomplished its purpose through prompting, validating and extending the spread of the good news and the sovereignty of Christ through the ministry of the disciples and first evangelists. The work of the Spirit is so prominent in Luke’s second volume that some think it could just as aptly be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.”

The World of the Bible

The World

As so often in John’s gospel and letters, many terms have two levels of meaning. Usually the world (Greek, cosmos) would describe the ordered quality of God’s creation.

But since John also sees a spiritual dimension to all of our existence, he uses the world as a shorthand way to refer to the forces that we often experience that resist the ordering power of God and so stand in opposition to Jesus and the Christian community.

But we must always remember that, although the world is hostile to God, God is not hostile to the world, which God created and has never ceased to love and care for, and so sends Jesus “into the world” for its salvation.