God’s Saving Presence

Scripture
Genesis 6:9–9:17

Jesus invites us to celebrate the arrival of God’s kingdom.
♦ In today’s gospel, Jesus ends his temptation in the desert by proclaiming the good news.
♦ With young children we focus on the Old Testament story of Noah and the ark.
♦ In today’s session we also begin several seasonal activities that will be repeated in coming weeks.

Question of the Week
God cared for both Noah and Jesus. How does God care for us?

Core Session
♦ Getting Started (vinyl shower curtain or tablecloth, dishpans, water toys, mirror)
♦ Old Testament Story: Noah, Build an Ark
♦ Prayer Corner (purple cloths, Bible; optional: flowers, bells, picture of Jesus, candles)
♦ Praying Together

Enrichment
♦ Discover the Good News
♦ Singing Together
♦ Story-Review Game: Noah’s In the Ark
♦ Art: Lawrence’s Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis, #3
♦ Book Corner (nature books)
♦ 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
♦ Liturgy Link: A Spirit of Prayer
♦ The World of the Bible: Covenant
Getting Started (10-15 minutes)
Use water play to introduce vocabulary and ideas from today’s story. Spread a vinyl shower curtain or tablecloth on a low table or on the floor. Put one or more dishpans on this waterproof surface. Place water toys, such as boats, cups and spoons nearby. Put 2”-3” of water in each pan.

Invite children to play with the water and toys. Talk with the children about the water, using the water play to define words used in today’s story; for example:
- Use different words for the toy boats: boat, ship, canoe, etc.
- Say, “In today’s story, I’m going to tell about a big, big boat that a man named Noah made. This big, big boat was called an ark.”
- If you have a sunny window, place a dishpan in front of the window. Lean a mirror against the inside of the pan to catch the sunlight. Hold a piece of white cardboard or poster board in front of the mirror and move mirror and poster board until a rainbow appears on the board.
- Say, “What do we call these colors when they appear in the sky? (a rainbow) There’s a rainbow in today’s story, too.”

Old Testament Story (5-10 minutes)
Noah, Build An Ark
Story focus: Invite children to clap with you on the last three words of each line (italicized).

“Noah, build an ark,” God said, said, said.
“For soon I will send a flood, flood, flood.

“Make the ark big and strong, strong, strong.
Take all your family a-long, long, long.

“Take along birds and kangaroos, roos, roos,
And every kind of animal by twos, twos, twos.

“I’m making you a promise I will keep, keep, keep:
You’ll be safe from the waters deep, deep, deep.”

Noah, family, animals went on board, board, board.
Rain fell and God shut the door, door, door.

For 40 days the rain came from the sky, sky, sky.
But inside the ark all was dry, dry, dry.

God made the waters go down, down, down.
And Noah stepped out on dry ground, ground, ground.

“I’ll make you a promise,” God said, said, said.
“I’ll give you a sign over your head, head, head.”

God put a rainbow in the sky, sky, sky:
“Never will I send a flood so high, high, high!”

Lenten Worship (10-25 minutes)
Prayer Corner
Children make a prayer corner to use throughout Lent.

Explain:
- Today we begin a special time in our Church year.
  This time is called Lent.
- The color we use in Lent is purple.

If possible, take children on a walk through the sanctuary, looking for purple altar cloths, pulpit hangings, cross drapings, etc. Whether or not you take the walk together explain:
- Lent is a purple time.
- Lent is a prayer time, too.
- Let’s make a special prayer place for Lent.

Invite children to find a place in the room for a prayer corner. Help children decorate the corner with purple cloths and an open Bible. Children can also add such items as fresh or dried flowers, unlit purple pillar or votive candles, small bells or pictures of Jesus.

Keep the materials available for children to use throughout the season of Lent.

Praying Together (5 minutes)
Sit with children in the prayer corner. If you are using candles, consider leaving them unlit since some children are sensitive to the smoke from candles.

Pray:
- Thank you, God, for saving Noah from the flood.
- Thank you, God, for giving us rainbows.
- Thank you, God, for so many things. (Invite children to add their own thanksgivings to the prayer.)
- Thank you, God, for (name each child individually).
  Amen.

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*, children will find a cut-and-fold version of today’s story. Children can take this activity home or complete it in the session. If you do the activity in the session, either get a few extra helpers or work with one child at a time to complete the project.

□ **Singing Together**  
(5-10 minutes)
From *Singing the Good News* you and the children can sing together:
- “God Makes Promises” (p. 28 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)
- “Friends with God” (p. 32 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*.

□ **Story-Review Game**  
(10-15 minutes)
**Noah’s In the Ark**
Ask a volunteer to be Noah. Help the other children stand in a circle around Noah and join hands. Ask the children to walk in a circle around the center as they sing these words to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell”:

*Oh, Noah’s in the ark,*  
*Oh, Noah’s in the ark,*  
*Heigh-ho the floody-o,*  
*Oh, Noah’s in the ark.*

Remind the children that Noah took animals two by two into the ark. As the next verse is sung ask the child playing Noah to choose two children to join him or her in the circle.

*Oh, Noah takes two birds,*  
*Oh, Noah takes two birds,*  
*Heigh-ho the floody-o,*  
*Oh, Noah takes two birds.*  
(The children chosen imitate birds, for example, by flapping their arms.)

Repeat this verse again, asking the children chosen as *birds* to think of a new animal for the verse. The two children chosen for this new animal invent appropriate movements and choose an animal for the next verse. Continue playing until all the children are in the middle.

End by helping the children join hands, raised high above their heads, as the children sing:

*The rainbow’s in the sky,*  
*The rainbow’s in the sky,*  
*Heigh-ho, God’s promise-o,*  
*The rainbow’s in the sky.*

□ **Art**  
(10-15 minutes)
**Lawrence’s Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis, #3**
Gather children around Jacob Lawrence’s painting *Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis, #3*, attached to this document. This colorful poster shows an animated, modern version of preaching. We will use this poster several times in Spring to help children enter into the experience of sharing our stories of God and God’s people.

Ask children to talk about what they see in the picture. Can they find people in the picture? What are the people doing? If they could stand in the picture, too, where would they like to stand?

**Explain:**
- Some people in the picture are listening to stories about God.
- One person in the picture is telling stories about God.
- Listen as I read you words from scripture that tell us about God.

Read aloud these words abridged from *Genesis 9:8-15*:

God said to Noah, "Whenever the rainbow appears, I will remember my promise to you.

Ask the children:
- What did God put in the sky when God made this promise to Noah? *(a rainbow)*
**Book Corner** (10-15 minutes)

**Nature**

Today's scripture story inspires children’s book writers and artists. Try sharing a picture book about today’s themes with the children. We recommend:

- *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1987). Mother and child trace the seasons of the year as they plant a garden that explodes in all the colors of the rainbow. Reading this book before (or after) today's art activity can help children enrich their understanding of color.

- *I See the Moon* by Kathi Appelt; illustrated by Debra Reid Jenkins. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Images of God comfort a small child dreaming that she is alone at sea. You can follow this story by asking children, “What do you think Noah saw when he sailed at sea?”

**Young Children and the Lectionary**

In Lent, we explore several Old Testament stories especially appropriate, both to the season and to the interests of young children.

Today's session for the 1st Sunday of Lent tells the story of Noah's rescue from the flood, focusing on the rainbow as a sign of God's promise of life to Noah.

**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 Old Testament Story: *Noah, Build an Ark.*
  - A pair of alternative activities using today’s rainbow theme titled *Art Activities: Rainbows.*
  - Directions for a *Story-Review Snack.*
  - Jacob Lawrence’s *Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis,* #3, to be used in today’s Art activity.
  - 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 *Season of Lent.*
  - For catechists and/or families, an article titled *Covenants.*
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings affirm God’s promise of continuing relationship. In Genesis 9, life begins anew, sealed by God’s promise to all creatures and confirmed by the rainbow. The author of 1 Peter explains that we are saved through the cleansing water of baptism. In the gospel, Jesus’ 40 days of temptation in the wilderness end with the proclamation of God’s good news.

Genesis 9:8-15
Both Jewish and Christian tradition attribute the writing of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, to Moses. Modern scholars now recognize that the Pentateuch is composed of several strands of tradition preserved and edited over centuries of Jewish history. The story of the flood is itself an ancient one, shared by several Near Eastern cultures, but the biblical account has its own unique theological perspective.

“[Jesus’] ministry was clearly defined, and the alternatives to the illusion and temptations of the desert were spelled out. A choice was made—life abundant, full, and free for all. Make no mistake about it, the day that choice was made, Jesus became suspect. That day he sealed the fate already prepared for him. How was the world to understand one who rejected an offer of power and control?”
—Joan B. Campbell
Sojourners, Aug-Sept 1991

Through Noah, God makes the first covenant, a covenant with all humans and animals for all generations. The sign of the covenant, the rainbow, is a sign of peace, showing that God’s wrath was over and the stability of the natural order was guaranteed. This first covenant demonstrates the trustworthiness of God who makes promises and keeps them.

1 Peter 3:18-22
For many scholars, the excellent Greek style of this letter, its use of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the lack of direct reference to Jesus’ teaching all suggest that the letter was not written directly by Peter, but perhaps by a companion, disciple or scribe of his.

In this reading, the author seems to have used parts of a hymn to frame statements about Jesus’ authority and the meaning of baptism. Christ died “once,” not only as a model to be followed but also to bring new access to God.

The author draws parallels between the destructive but cleansing waters of the flood and the cleansing, saving waters of baptism. Verse 21b is translated more literally, “a pledge to God from (or of) a good conscience.” Thus, the believer’s baptism is effective not as a physical washing, but as a sign of one’s new life in Christ.

Mark 1:12-15
Today’s reading recounts Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. The event of empowerment by the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism (vv. 9-11) immediately leads into a time of testing. The 40 days recall the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2), the 40 days of Moses on the mountain (Exodus 24:18; 34:28) and the 40 days of Elijah’s journey (1 Kings 19:8). Exposure to temptation is a continuing theme of Jesus’ ministry, in the desire of the crowds for a sign (8:11), in Peter’s rebuke (8:32-33) and in the jeers of the crowds at his crucifixion (15:29-32).

Apparently Jesus was prompted by the end of John the Baptist’s active ministry to begin his public work. Jesus now proclaims that “the time is fulfilled.” The work of the prophets, including John the Baptist, was to prepare for God’s kingly rule. In Jesus, however, all God’s prophetic words find their fulfillment. The prophets were called to speak God’s message, while Jesus is God’s message. “The kingdom of God has come near” (v. 15), that is, the kingdom of God is more than merely nearby, it is present in Jesus.

Reflection
Many of us, finding ourselves in a desert place, wonder how we got there. Was it my fault? Or could I blame some handy moron? If we look to today’s gospel, it’s the Spirit who sends Jesus to the desert.

This might seem like a cruel Spirit indeed, until we read the qualifying phrase: “and angels waited on him.” It is possible that angels attend all our desert places. Where we sense the least comfort, there it abounds. When we feel estranged and lost among wild beasts, something stirs beneath the surface.

At least it was true for Jesus. He emerges from the desert with a spurt of energy that launches his public life. After 40 dry days to consider his message, he bursts forth with good news. Perhaps he knew the
The characteristic Jewish form of prayer is *berakah*, a blessing or a thanksgiving to God. This consists of an opening proclamation of thanks and praise, the recollection of the saving deeds of God, a request that these deeds be realized in the present or future and a concluding note of praise.

Many examples of such prayer can be found in scripture, especially in the Psalms. The *berakah* also had a strong influence on the development of Christian prayers, especially on the eucharistic prayers. An examination of the eucharistic prayers in the Mass reveals that they are in the form of *berakah*.

**The World of the Bible**

**Covenant**

A covenant is a formal agreement between two persons or parties that spells out the obligations of their relationship. In the biblical world, the general expectations were modeled on the customs that guided relationships between persons of unequal honor, status and wealth. These relationships were voluntary and freely entered into and were not required by law. The covenant bound the parties in mutual and reciprocal obligations.

The “patron” or more powerful person (like God) promised to provide for and protect the less powerful “clients” (from the Latin word for dependents). In return, to enhance the honor and reputation of the patron, the clients offered respect, praise and gratitude and other favors when requested.

God’s directives or basic guidelines for the Hebrew covenant community’s life with one another are given as commandments, statutes and decrees. Together they identify the basic attitudes and actions that must be followed to fulfill God’s desires.

**Commandments** refers to the 10 basic “words” that God spoke directly to Moses and the community on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). When the people are overcome by fear, they request that in the future God not speak to them directly but only through Moses. **Statutes and decrees** describe this further indirect teaching through Moses that makes the many specific applications of the Ten Commandments to the everyday life of the community.