Jesus Transfigured

In the face of God's awesome glory, Jesus grants us peace.

- Jesus gathers his disciples on a mountaintop, where God transfigures him. We tell this story (story and activities attached), but focus on the Old Testament story, in which Abraham and Sarah travel to the new home that God gives them.
- Preschool/Kindergarten children find the idea of travel inviting, but the idea of moving from their homes scary. In today’s session we acknowledge these varied feelings.
- Today’s session explores God’s care for us on our journeys through stories, games and art.

Question of the Week
If you climb a mountain with Jesus, what might you see? hear? What would you say to Jesus?
✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)
Invite the children to make a playhouse by draping cloths over tables or chairs. Allow time for the children to explore their playhouse through imaginative play. Then gather children in the storytelling area.

Encourage children to talk about their own homes. You can use such questions as:
* How is your home like our playhouse?
* How is your home different from our playhouse?
* What does your house look like?

✓ Old Testament Story (5-10 minutes)
Sarah and Abraham

Story Focus: Use movements to help children focus on today’s story. Young children will generally join in with movements modeled by an adult, but you can invite them to do so, too.

Abraham and Sarah are husband and wife. They live together happily in their home. “I love our home,” says Abraham. (Rock yourself as you say this and the next two sentences.)

“I love our friends,” says Sarah. “I love our family.”

One day God says, “Abraham and Sarah, you must leave your home. You must leave your friends. You must leave your family.”

“But God,” say Sarah and Abraham. “We don’t want to leave.” (Shake your head “no.”)

“I know,” says God. “But I want you to leave. I have a new place for you to live.”

Sarah and Abraham are sad. “Goodbye, home,” says Sarah. (Wave “goodbye” as you say this and the next two sentences.)

“Goodbye, family,” says Abraham. “Goodbye, friends.”

“I will show you where to go,” God tells them.

Sarah and Abraham walk many, many miles. They walk many, many days. (“Walk” your fingers on the surface in front of you.) “Here is the new place,” God says. “This is Canaan, where you will make your new home.”

“Hello, Canaan,” says Sarah.

“Hello, new home,” says Abraham. And together they pray. (Raise your arms in prayer or fold your hands.) “Thank you, God, for bringing us to this new land. Thank you, God, for our new home.”

☐ Walking to Canaan (10-15 minutes)
Use the two play homes made with cloths and chairs. Invite the children to repeat the walk from Abraham and Sarah’s old home to the new land. You can vary the walk with these activities:

Chant and clap as you walk. As you walk away from the “old home,” chant (clap on each syllable): “Walk a-way from home.” As you reach the halfway point to “God’s new land,” change the chant to: “Walk to God’s new land.”

Change the movements you use to travel from the “old home” to “God’s new land.” Invite children to suggest movements, for example, jumping, hopping, twirling, etc. Invite the children to walk with you backwards away from the “old home.” Halfway across, turn and face “God’s new land.” Invite the children to keep rhythm with the chant in various ways: clapping, slapping thighs, playing rhythm instruments, etc.

 ✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)
Stand or sit in a circle with the children. Say:
* God was with Sarah and Abraham in their old home.
* God was with Abraham and Sarah in God’s new land.
* God is with us right now.
* What would you like to say to God today? (Wait for children’s responses.)

Close by praying:
* Thank you, God, for being with Sarah and Abraham in their old home. Thank you for being with Abraham and Sarah in your new land. Thank you for being with us right now. Amen.

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 the Lenten cross rhyme illustrated for young children.

You will also find an activity where a family engages in three simple Lenten practices: reading scripture, praying together and offering money. You can help children tell stories about each of the three Lenten pictures shown.

□ Singing Together  (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Abram Went to the Land of Canaan” (p. 34 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.

□ Lenten Review  (5-15 minutes)
Children repeat an action rhyme learned in the 1st Sunday of Lent. Stand in a circle with the children. Recite this action rhyme with the children. Speak slowly.

I stand here straight and tall.
(Stand, arms stretched straight over head.)

I open my arms to all.
(Slowly lower arms to cross position.)

I make a cross, as Jesus did,
(Stand with arms outstretched in cross shape.)

For people big and small.
(Keep cross shape as you rise up on tiptoes, then bend knees to stoop.)

On a cross our Jesus died.
(Cross arms over chest.)

But now our Jesus is alive.
(Stand straight, arms stretched wide and overhead.)

I make a cross, with you and you;
(Lower arms to cross shape.)

Jesus loves us. We love, too!
(Join hands with neighbors.)

□ Musical Game  (5-15 minutes)

Oh, Abraham and Sarah
Distribute rhythm instruments, if available.

Teach children to sing this game song to the tune of “Go In and Out the Window”; (if you don’t know this tune, simply chant the words in rhythm):

Oh, Abraham and Sarah,
Oh, Abraham and Sarah,
Oh, Abraham and Sarah,
It’s time to leave your home.

Ask two children to be Abraham and Sarah. These children go inside the playhouse made in today’s Getting Started activity. The other children form two lines, facing each other, to form a path.

These children sing the game song. At the end of the song, they join hands together to form an arch over the path. Abraham and Sarah come out of the house and walk down the arched path as the children sing:

Oh, Abraham and Sarah,
Oh, Abraham and Sarah,
Oh, Abraham and Sarah,
It’s time to walk with God.

When Abraham and Sarah reach the end of the arched path, they can walk outside the lines of children, go back to the beginning of the path and walk through again until the whole of the second verse has been sung.

The two children then join the lines that form the path. Two new volunteers take the parts of Abraham and Sarah.
Art

Pictures of Home
Children discuss and make their own pictures of homes.

Gather children around the African House photograph, attached to this document. Encourage children to talk about the house in the picture:
◆ How does the house in the picture look like our homes?
◆ How does the house in the picture look different from our homes?

Explain that Abraham's and Sarah's home would have looked different from this house, too, but nobody knows exactly what their home looked like.

Briefly review today's story:
◆ God asked Sarah and Abraham to leave their home.
◆ Abraham and Sarah walked to a new land, where they would build a new home.

Ask:
◆ What do you think Abraham's and Sarah's old home looked like?
◆ What do you think Sarah's and Abraham's new home looked like?

Invite children to make pictures of homes. Children can choose to make a picture of their own homes or of Sarah's and Abraham's home.

Cut several sheets of construction paper into large, simple shapes (triangles, rectangles, circles, etc.).

Set the materials in the center of a work surface. Briefly show that the children can:
◆ draw with any of the chosen materials
◆ glue cut-paper shapes to a larger paper to make a picture
◆ cut new shapes from paper to use in making a picture

Young Children and the Lectionary

The first four sessions of Spring-A tell the stories of important figures from the Old Testament: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and David. In today's session we tell the story of God's call to Abram and Sarai.

Our spiritual ancestors respond in faith by leaving their home and traveling to God's new land. Since today's story contains no account of how Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah, we use the more common names to introduce these Old Testament heroes to the children.

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 child-friendly version of today’s lectionary Gospel Story: Jesus on the Mountain.
  — A helpful tip for catechists on using Art with Young Children.
  — A Transfiguration Craft Activity that includes a Transfiguration Coloring Sheet master on page 2.
  — The article on Learning Centers.
  — 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.
  — An article for catechists and/or families exploring Keeping Lent.
  — Suggestions for Starting a Small-Group Bible Study.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

In today’s readings, faithful encounters with God lead to radical transformation. Hearing the call of God, Abram leaves his country and his people, following God into a new life. In 2 Timothy, Paul assures us that, by grace, faith in Jesus brings power, salvation and life. In the gospel, three of Jesus’ disciples witness his transfiguration and hear the voice of God announcing, “This is my Son, the Beloved…” (Matthew 17:5).

Genesis 12:1-4a

At this point in the book of Genesis, the focus changes from the story of all humanity to the story of one man, Abram, and through him to the story of a chosen people. The Lord takes the initiative and calls Abram (later Abraham) out of his family structure and the social and cultural security of his present location in Haran to go to the unknown land that God will show him. His response is the first of the trustful acts that define him as preeminently the Old Testament man of faith.

Abraham and his descendants are chosen to inherit a land, become a great nation and mediate blessing to all the world. The story of Abraham shows how God acts in history through the responses of individuals and peoples. Abraham’s decision to yield to the will of God no matter the sacrifice demonstrates the nature of the friendship he had with God.

2 Timothy 1:8b-10

As the second letter to Timothy begins, Timothy is reminded that he received the “gift” of God (Greek, charisma) by the laying on of hands (probably a ceremony of special commissioning, as it still is today).

God’s intervention in our lives involves both salvation and sanctification, the call to a holy life. These two aspects are inseparable. Although people are not called because of their merits, they must respond to God’s call by working daily to make their lives more holy.

Matthew 17:1-9

In Matthew’s account of the transfiguration, he emphasizes parallels with Moses’ experience in Exodus 24. The appearance takes place on a mountain after six days. Jesus’ face shines. The cloud overshadows Jesus and his companions. A voice speaks from the cloud. The command to “listen to him” (v. 5) recalls the Jewish messianic expectation of a prophet like Moses.

Matthew’s account links the transfiguration to the final coming of the Messiah as prefigured in the Church. As Matthew tells it, Jesus’ transfiguration is primarily a manifestation of who Jesus really is. Moses and Elijah vanish, for the law and the prophets have been fulfilled in what Jesus has done, and Jesus alone remains with them.

Reflection

The Irish name them “the thin places,” where the divine breaks through into humdrum human life.

We may know such places from our own experiences: when a certain slant of light touches the new spring leaves or the autumn foliage; during an intense and special conversation; as someone long awaited steps from a car or plane; as we achieve an insight. Paul must’ve known such an experience when he wrote: “All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory…” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Surely today’s gospel recounts one such experience, indeed, the model and highlight of all such times. Before his suffering, during his prayer, with his friends—Jesus is affirmed as he was at his baptism. God is with him; through him, God breaks into human life. Hope trickles into loss. When the disciples see Jesus in dazzling light, they see themselves afresh. Belden Lane explains in The Solace of Fierce Landscapes that on Tabor, “the mystery of one’s own deification is disclosed” (p. 125). Then, in turn, Jesus’ vitality surges through us; we too have our moments to shine like the sun.
The Scriptures and the Catechism

Our faith is a response to God’s call (CCC, #825, 2014–15). Like Abraham, we are called into a relationship with God through which we will be blessed and in turn bless others (CCC, #145–46). Jesus’ transfiguration is a reminder that we are called to be transformed through our choices to follow Jesus (CCC, #554–56).

Liturgy Link

Discipleship of Lent

Celebrated in the spring when nature begins its renewal, Lent has long been the primary time for renewing our discipleship by adopting some more rigorous discipline to heighten our spiritual awareness. For 40 days we are encouraged to prepare to celebrate the primary mystery of our human existence: new life comes through death.

The idea of discipline relates to the experience of being a disciple. The disciple is a learner, and discipline is the way of learning. It includes instruction for the mind and exercises for the body. This means studying more intensely the scriptures and the doctrines of our faith and adopting practices that heighten our spiritual awareness, in particular by shifting the focus away from our bodily need for sustenance and survival to the need of our soul for union with God.

Although some think that the Church has been too lax by not specifying Lenten practices for everyone, in fact the Church recognizes our uniqueness and our maturity in Christ. The burden has now been put on each of us to search out and put into practice what we need most. We are responsible for tailoring our Lenten practices to the needs of our spiritual life. For some this will demand “giving up” and for others “taking on” attitudes and behaviors in order to become more like Jesus.

Fasting, for example, has long been an avenue to increased spiritual sensitivity. When our bodies are too well-fed, it is often difficult to experience our need for God. Fasting can reorient our priorities about the meaning of bodily sustenance.

But no matter what we decide to do for Lent, the important thing is our inner motive. As Jesus so often warned us, the outward action can be done for a wide variety of reasons.

The importance of discipline cannot be overestimated. Only through discipline can we achieve genuine freedom. Discipline indicates a regular pattern of training for any activity. If we wish to play the piano, for example, we must submit to the discipline of learning the finger movements to produce the correct notes. Just as many want freedom to play anything on the piano, virtuosos know that freedom only comes after long hours of disciplined practice. So likewise, we who want freedom to live a deeper spiritual life must remember that freedom only comes if we are willing to pay the price of learning to discipline ourselves. Fasting, abstinence and other practices that we might wish to adopt for our Lenten observance can help us to achieve our spiritual goal—freedom in Christ.

The World of the Bible

Transfiguration

Although the Greek word here (metamorphosis) commonly described a change in form or appearance that a god might make to be able to appear to humans, the gospel writers suggest a completely new meaning. The transfiguration is a glimpse of God’s hidden glory breaking forth from Jesus’ human form.

After revealing to the disciples that as Messiah he would have to suffer, Jesus’ changed appearance previews the change that he will undergo at his resurrection. The dazzling light, the divine voice of approval, the support of the whole Jewish tradition represented by Moses (the Jewish Law) and Elijah (the prophets) signal that his messianic suffering is the fulfillment of God’s plan for salvation.

The transfiguration of Jesus is meant to strengthen the disciples on the road to Jerusalem, whether those disciples are those on the mountain or those who are on the road to Jerusalem in their earthly pilgrimage here and now. Even in the face of mocking, scourging, and death, the Lord reveals the glory that is to be his and the glory that the faithful will share with him.

In this sense, the transfiguration serves as a parenesis, a story told to encourage the faithful in times of persecution and distress. Its relation to the baptism of Jesus and his affirmation as God’s Son reminds Christians that, just as they have joined Christ in baptism, so after many trials and tests, they will join with him in glory.