Eyes Open to Jesus

Jesus heals our spiritual blindness.

- In today’s gospel, Jesus heals a man born blind. We tell this story, but focus on God’s choice of David the shepherd boy who will be King of God’s people.
- Young children are happy to hear that God loves and chooses even a young child.
- Today’s session explores two lectionary stories together with the season of Lent.

Question of the Week
Imagine seeing for the first time. How does it feel?

Core Session
- Getting Started
- Old Testament Story: The Eight Sons of Jesse (optional: old pair of light-colored cotton gloves, cotton balls)
- God Chooses You
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Art (optional: confetti, felt, sewing elastic, large safety pin, interfacing, needle and thread, ribbons, sew-on stars, jewels, flowers, etc.)
- Story-Review Game (optional: collection of hats and scarves, box)
- Lenten Review (crosses, purple vestments, napkins or ribbons)
- Info: Young Children and the Lectionary
- 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 Gospel of John

Scriptures
1 Samuel 16:1-13
John 9:1-11
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)

Ask children to name members of their families. Do they have sisters? What are the names of their sisters? Do they have brothers? What are the names of their brothers? Can they tell how many brothers and sisters they have? (Not all young children will be able to answer this question accurately.)

Children can also draw pictures of their families. Ask volunteers to show their pictures and name the people in them. Close by inviting children to hear a story about a boy with seven brothers.

**Old Testament Story** (5-10 minutes)

The Eight Sons of Jesse

*Story Focus:* You can make a set of story gloves to use as a visual focus for today’s story. Draw the faces of Samuel, Jesse, the seven sons of Jesse and the eighth son, David. Glue white cotton for Samuel’s hair and beard. Draw a shepherd’s crook for David.

God says, “Samuel, go to Jesse’s house. Jesse has eight sons and I have chosen one of them to be a king.”

Samuel walks to Jesse’s house. “Show me your sons,” Samuel says to Jesse. First the oldest son comes out. He is handsome and strong; he wears wonderful clothes. Samuel thinks, “This must be the one who will be king.”

But God says, “No. I don’t care how strong and handsome he is. This is not the one.”

Then the second son comes out, but again God says, “No!” And so it goes with the third son, the fourth son, the fifth son, the sixth son and even the seventh son.

Samuel shakes his head, saying to Jesse, “God hasn’t chosen any of these sons of yours!”

Jesse says, “I have one more son, but he’s not dressed to meet you. He’s too young. He’s out taking care of the sheep.”

Samuel says, “Tell him to come here.”

So the youngest son comes in; his name is David.

“Yes!” says God to Samuel. “This youngest boy of all is the one I choose to be king!” And God’s Spirit was with David from that day on.

**God Chooses You** (10-20 minutes)

Stand in a circle with the children. If children have made crowns in today’s Art activity, ask the children to wear them. Say:

♦ God chose David. God loved David.
♦ God chooses you, too. God loves you.

Walk behind one child, resting a hand on his or her shoulder and saying:

♦ God chooses (child’s name). God loves (child’s name).

Invite the children to respond by saying:

♦ Thank you, God, for (child’s name).

Continue around the circle until you have thanked God for each child. You could also sing these words to the tune of “Oh, Do You Know the Muffin Man?” You’ll find an illustrated version of this song on page one of today’s Discover the Good News.

Oh, David was a shepherd boy, a shepherd boy, a shepherd boy, Oh, David was a shepherd boy, who lived in Bethlehem. Oh, God chose him to be the king, to be the king, to be the king, Oh, God chose him to be the king, the king of Israel.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Close by praying:

♦ Thank you, God, for choosing us. Thank you, God, for loving us. 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 a simple song about David you can sing with the children.

You will also find a hide-and-seek game based on the story of David. You can help children find all the hidden brothers in the game.

**Singing Together** (5-10 minutes)
From *Singing the Good News*, sing together:
◆ “David Was a Shepherd Boy” (p. 36 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*.

**Art** (10-20 minutes)
Children make paper Star-of-David crowns to use in the games below. Invite children to take these crowns home at the end of the session. We also include directions for a durable felt crown that you can make for children to use in imaginative play throughout the year.

**Paper Crowns**
*Before the session* cut one 2” x 18” strip of construction paper for each crown. Cut triangles in assorted colors and sizes.

In the session invite children to decorate the crowns. Set up a work area with the paper shapes, construction paper scraps, scissors and glue. Show how to make a star of David by gluing two triangles together.

Ask the children to count the points on one star. Explain that a star like this with six points is a special symbol for King David.

Children can decorate the crowns with stars of David, other paper shapes and even confetti. Write the children’s names on the crowns; some children may want to do this themselves. Tape each finished crown to fit the child’s head.

**Felt Crown** *(for catechists to make before the session)*
Even the simplest sewing skills are enough to make a beautiful and durable felt crown for a dress-up center. Add colorful cloths, sashes and scarves to stimulate imaginative play.

From the felt, cut one 3” x 12” strip. Fold the strip in half. Sew along the edges to make a casing for the elastic.

Insert a safety pin or diaper pin through the elastic. Use the pin to pull the elastic through the casing. Fold the remaining 6” x 12” strip of felt in half, to make a doubled 3” x 12” rectangle.

Use scissors to trim this piece of felt into a pleasing crown shape. Cut a piece of interfacing or stiff muslin to match the crown shape. Fold the felt over the interfacing.

Sew the open edge of the crown front closed. Sew the elastic band to each side of the crown front; be sure to catch the elastic in your stitches. Decorate the finished crown with ribbons and sew-on trim.
Story-Review Game (10-20 minutes)

Bring the Sheep to the Shepherd

Children review today’s story by playing simple games. If you didn’t make crowns, use a collection of hats and scarves to act as substitute “crowns.”

You’ll find a colorful cooperative board game, in which children work together to bring the sheep to the Shepherd, attached to this document.

In this game, children roll a color cube to move matching-colored sheep along a path. The sheep don’t “belong” to any one player. Instead, all the children work together to bring all the sheep home to the Shepherd.

Lenten Review (10-20 minutes)

As in the sessions for the 1st through 3rd Sundays of Lent, make crosses and purple Lenten cloths (vestments, napkins or ribbons) available for the children’s exploration. Review the Lenten rhyme from those sessions by gathering children in a circle around a plain cross. Slowly recite this action rhyme with the children:

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.)

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. Because we continue to tell stories from the Old Testament, the focus for these sessions does not reflect the gospel-related focus statement chosen for all age levels.

Instead today’s story tells how God reveals his chosen king, David, to the prophet Samuel. This story contains a familiar element of folktales: David is the youngest child who is chosen over his older and supposedly more important brothers. This story element has a special appeal to young 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 printable version of today’s Old Testament Story: The Eight Sons of Jesse, to use in the session or to send home with—or e-mail to—children and their parents.
— A child-friendly version of this week’s Gospel Story: I Can See!
— An alternate Story-Review Game: Are You the One?
— An excerpt from our Special Needs resource, Rhythms of Grace detailing the various Characteristics of Autism.
— A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families.

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 titled First Impressions, which offers practical helps for experiencing and teaching about fine art.
— A printable article for catechists and/or families exploring traditional Lenten Disciplines in the lives of believers.
— A printable article for catechists examining Using the Arts to Bring Different Age Groups Together.
— The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

In today’s readings, we explore another image of Jesus: light for the world, dispelling spiritual darkness. In the first reading, Samuel sees beyond outward appearances to choose the least likely son of Jesse as king. Paul explains to the Ephesians that the Christian’s life must be characterized by the light of holiness. In today’s gospel, a blind man gains sight and worships Jesus.

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

Prior to today’s reading, God had already rejected Saul as king because of his disobedience and had indicated that another had been chosen. In grief and fear, Samuel refuses to see Saul again.

Unlike Saul, Samuel waits for God’s instructions and follows them precisely. These instructions seem to run contrary even to what Samuel might have expected. God teaches him that human wisdom does not penetrate the depths that God’s wisdom does.

Public acknowledgment of David’s anointing would come only after years of trouble and persecution. The story, however, indicates that, despite all the scheming of David’s rise to power, God had raised him up and made his victories possible. David, unlike his predecessor, Saul, had found the secret of life: doing God’s will.

Ephesians 5:8-14

Today’s reading comes from a section urging members of the Christian community to live out the reality of their new baptismal life, imitating God as known to them through Christ—forgiving, loving and offering themselves. Gentile converts may have believed that physical actions were irrelevant to spiritual existence. Paul affirms that both words and deeds give evidence of new life.

The old and the new ways of life are contrasted as “once…darkness, now…light” (v. 8). The baptized receive enlightenment and now live as light to others.

John 9:1-41

John uses a healing story as a commentary on 8:12, an enactment of the triumph of light over darkness. The belief in a causal relationship between sin and suffering was widespread, but Jesus turns the attention from cause to purpose—the manifestation of God’s works through Jesus’ ministry.

The interrogations that the healed man and his parents undergo become, in effect, a trial of Jesus. The increasing insight of the man is contrasted with the hardening blindness of the Pharisees. The man, who is not afraid to confess his ignorance, progresses from seeing Jesus as a man to seeing him as a prophet, then asserting that Jesus must be from God, and finally worshiping him as the Son of Man, through whom God would usher in the final era of judgment and salvation (v. 39).

The Pharisees are at first divided. Some are open but others, by applying the test of Deuteronomy 13:1-5, see Jesus as a sabbath-breaker, either for healing a non-life-threatening illness and/or for kneading the clay and anointing on the sabbath.

For the man born blind, however, his healing is more than sight regained. It is a new creation, a gift of light in order to see Jesus and believe in him.

Reflection

“One thing I do know,” says the blind man (John 9:25). According to William Countryman, “This moment of enlightenment is the great turning point of John’s Gospel” (The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel, p. 74).

Why are five words so pivotal? Consider the source: because of his blindness since birth, the man has not read the Torah, and doesn’t know the laws in which the authorities try to entangle him. He draws purely and simply from his own dramatic experience. As Countryman says, “He looks to Jesus now as the one reliable point of access between God and humanity, as the touchstone of everything in human life” (p. 74).

Then he trusts Jesus completely. The title Son of Man (John 9:35) may be meaningless, but he’s so indebted to Jesus he’ll believe anything he says, and does him reverence.
In contrast, the Pharisees desperately cling to the past, boasting, “we are disciples of Moses” (John 9:28). Their tenacious clinging to tradition prevents them from seeing God’s splendid action in the present.

And we? Are we so caught up in custom that we fail to see the stunning realities of our own lives? What is the “one thing”—the experience of God—on which we base our belief?

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Our knowledge of God always begins with everyday, material realities and moves through them to the divine reality (CCC, #1145–62). The man born blind illustrates how we grow in our faith knowledge until we can affirm the truth about God as the basis for our living witness to this good news (CCC, #1434–39).

The World of the Bible

The Gospel of John

During Lent this year, many of the gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of John. The fourth gospel is much different in tone and style from the other three, which, because of their interdependence, present a somewhat similar account of Jesus’ life and teaching. John’s gospel seems to be based on an independent source of traditions about Jesus. In contrast to the other gospels, John reports no parables or exorcisms and puts a greater emphasis on Jesus’ divinity.

Authorship in biblical times was not limited to actually writing down the text. Often a designated author was simply the authority for the book, the source of the teachings and memories. According to tradition, the authorship of the fourth gospel is attributed to the apostle John, son of Zebedee. However most scholars today find this unlikely and consider that the author was not one of the twelve but may have been one of the wider group of disciples. He is idealized as the mysterious “beloved disciple” figure that appears in the gospel story.

John portrays Jesus both as fully human (he became tired and thirsty, wept, suffered and died), and as the Christ in whom dwelt the fullness of God. John often uses the phrase “eternal life” where the other gospels use the kingdom of God. Life eternal has burst into human life in the person of Christ Jesus.

John’s gospel reflects a movement away from eager anticipation of the imminent return of Christ toward a more spiritual understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the world. Later in the second century, some heretics appealed to John’s gospel to support their beliefs about a spiritual life seemingly unrelated to flesh-and-blood reality.

However, there is little evidence that John’s words were meant to have such a connotation. John’s language, especially the images of light and darkness so central to John’s development, has close parallels to the language in scrolls found at Qumran, dated before 68 CE.

John states that his purpose for writing the gospel is to strengthen the faith of the believer and so lead to full life with God:

“These [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:31).