We prepare for Jesus by turning to God.

- In today’s gospel, Mark begins his gospel with a call to repentance personified in the John the Baptist’s call to baptism.
- For young children we focus on the person of John the Baptist by telling how his birth was foretold to his father as well as the story of his prophetic call to look for the One who is coming.
- In today’s session we explore the stories and the Advent season through crafts, games and rhythmic stories.

**Question of the Week**
What changes do we like? not like? Why might we be reluctant to accept change, even change brought by God?

**Core Session**
- Getting Started (paper-link calendar made in the session for 1st Advent)
- Dressing Angels (dolls, fabric scraps or crepe paper, yarn, gold pipe cleaners or foil, hole punch, rubber bands)
- Gospel Story: Zechariah and the Angel
- Praying Together (Advent wreath or candles)

**Enrichment**
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Advent Action Rhyme: Look for Jesus
- Story Review Game
- Crèche Play (simple crèche set, baskets of natural materials)
- 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
- Faith Formation and the Arts, Part 2
- The World of the Bible: Baptism of Repentance

**Scripture**
Mark 1:1-8

**Called to Repentance**
**Getting Started** (5-10 minutes)
Advent activities begun in the session for the 1st Sunday of Advent remind children that today we celebrate Advent, the time we get ready for Jesus.

If you made a paper-link Advent calendar in the session for the 1st Sunday of Advent, gather children around it. Explain:
- We are getting ready for Christmas during this special time called Advent.
- There are 28 days in Advent this year.
- For each day of Advent, we can tear off one of these paper strips.
- Today we will tear off seven more strips because seven days of Advent have gone by. (*Ask volunteers to tear off seven strips.*)

Touch the remaining 21 strips one-by-one as you count aloud how many days remain in Advent.

**Story Craft** (10-20 minutes)

**Dressing Angels**
Children help you dress dolls as angels. For this activity, have on hand one doll per child. You can borrow these from the children themselves or from the church nursery.

To dress dolls, no sewing is necessary; instead, estimate the size and cut the fabric or crepe paper to fit. Use yarn or strips of fabric or crepe paper to tie the fabric around the dolls.

Each angel needs a robe, a pair of wings and a halo made from pipe cleaners or foil strips. Wings may be cut from interfacing fabric or poster board; punch holes in the center section. Thread a rubber band through the holes and use the loops to hold the wings on the doll’s shoulders.

As the children help you dress the dolls, invite their free play and storytelling about angels. Explain:
- The Bible tells many stories about angels.
- In some stories, angels look like young men in white robes.
- In some stories, angels look like wild animals with wings.
- In all the stories, angels do a special job. Angels always tell good news from God.

The finished dolls can be used as a visual focus for today’s story. After the story, make the dolls available for free play.

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

**Zechariah and the Angel**
Focus: If children dressed dolls as preparation for the story, each child can hold a doll angel while listening to the story. Help children learn this story refrain: An angel, an angel, God’s angel. Children can move or hold aloft their angels as they repeat the refrain.

An angel, an angel came down from heaven.
*An angel, an angel, God’s angel.*

Zechariah looked up, and what did he see?
*An angel, an angel, God’s angel.*

“I have good news for you, Zechariah,” said the angel.
*An angel, an angel, God’s angel.*

“You and your wife Elizabeth will have a baby boy,” said the angel.
*An angel, an angel, God’s angel.*

“Is what you say really true?” said Zechariah.
“Yes,” said the angel. “For God sends me to tell good news. I am God’s angel.”
*An angel, an angel, God’s angel.*

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)
Gather around an Advent wreath or four pillar candles. Say:
- We have four Advent candles.
- There is one candle for each week until Christmas.
- We will light another candle each week.

Light two candles. Then softly repeat the words and motions from today’s Action Rhyme activity as a closing prayer.

Note: Distribute this week’s *At Home with 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. We also invite children to finish a drawing related to today’s story.

Singing Together (10-15 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Light Your Lamp” (songbook p. 14)
◆ “Prepare the Way” (songbook p. 16, also available as an MP3)

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

You can add simple movements to turn “Prepare the Way” into a lively circle dance. Ask the children to hold hands as they form a circle. Then sing the song aloud as you show the children these movements:

Prepare, prepare, prepare the way for Jesus in your heart.
(Circle left.)

Prepare, prepare, prepare the way.
Come on, it’s time to start!
(Circle right.)

We’ll skip along and sing our song, as we prepare the way,
(Skip as you circle left.)

for Jesus’ birth right here on earth that blessed Christmas day!
(Skip as you circle right.)

Note: For young children who cannot skip, substitute such words as walk, run or dance for the word skip.

You can also teach children an Advent hymn, such as the refrain to “O come, O come, Emmanuel.”

Advent Action Rhyme (5 minutes)
Look for Jesus
Review with children this Advent action-rhyme learned in the session for the 1st Sunday of Advent:

The golden sun,
(Hold arms to front, waist-level, in circle.)

Begins to rise;
(Slowly lift circle over head.)

Bright morning light now fills the skies.
(Slowly open arms to side, palms up.)

Look for Jesus! Look and say,
(Frame eyes with hands.)

“Will Jesus come to us today?”
(Stretch raised arms to front, then fold and cross them over chest.)

The evening sky grows dark and deep.
All the world falls fast asleep.
(Reverse morning movements: Hold arms to side, bring together over head to form setting sun. Then bring hands together and lay head on them, as on a pillow.)

Look for Jesus with all your might.
(Frame eyes with hands.)

Will Jesus come to us tonight?
(Stretch raised arms to front, then fold and cross them over chest.)

By morning sun
(Hold arms in circle.)

Or evening moon,
(Pillow head on hands.)

“Look!” says Jesus.
(Frame eyes.)

“I’m coming soon.”
(Cross arms over chest.)
**Story-Review Game** (5-10 minutes)

**Go, God’s Angels**
Children can hold angel dolls *(see today’s Story Craft)* while playing this game, but the game works without dolls, too.

Each child holds either their hands or an angel doll aloft while moving slowly toward the center of the room. When you give the signal, “Go, God’s angels,” the children run out toward the edges and corners of the room, calling out, “Good news! Good news from God!”

Vary the game by:
◆ asking children to take turns giving the signal
◆ asking children to give other messages from today’s story, such as:
  — A baby will be born!
  — Jesus is coming!

**Free Play** (10-20 minutes)

**Crèche Play**

*Activity Soundtrack:* Play Kimberly Braun’s “O Antiphons.” (Open your Winter-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Children explore the stories of the Nativity cycle through free play. As in the session for the 1st Sunday of Advent, we recommend that you provide this free-play area throughout the weeks of Advent and Christmas.

Cover a box, stool or small table with a cloth. Arrange the crèche figures on the table. Place baskets of natural materials nearby, such as evergreen branches, pine cones, twigs and stones. Invite two or three children at a time to explore this free-play area.

Because some children may worry about whether or not they may touch the crèche figures, emphasize the children’s freedom to touch, move and rearrange the figures and materials.

**Young Children and the Gospel**

Today is the 2nd Sunday of Advent, the season in which we prepare the way of the Lord. In today’s session, we join together two stories that tell about John the Baptist, the forerunner who points the way to the coming of the Christ, the Messiah. The seasons of Advent and Christmas invite us to consider the gifts which God gives each of us—community gifts, such as the supreme gift of Jesus Christ, and individual gifts, such as our personal talents.

You can expand the notion of gift giving by looking for ways to use children’s gifts in the room; for example:
◆ A child who knows how to tie his or her shoes can tie shoes for others.
◆ A child who is good at making peace can help two children settle an argument.
◆ A child who loves to jump and run can be the first child to try a new movement activity.

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 copy of today’s *Gospel Story: Zechariah and the Angel,* which can be distributed or e-mailed to children and their families.
  — Instructions for a Christmas Craft activity, *Trail Mix Christmas Gift.*
  — An enlarged-text version of the *Advent Action Rhyme,* to use in class or to distribute or e-mail to children and their families.
  — An optional *Reflection Activity* that looks at the names of Jesus.
  — An *Angel Wing Template* for use in today’s Story Craft.

◆ Open your Winter-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Winter-B’s *Models of the Faith.*
  — An article for catechists and/or families titled *The Gospel of Mark.*
  — An article for catechists and/or families titled *Advent Overview.*
  — Two articles for catechists and/or families by Roger Hutchison titled *Tapping into the Power of Art and Faith Formation and the Arts.*
  — An article for catechists and/or families titled *John the Baptist.*
  — A reproducible handout for catechists and/or families on *The O Antiphons.*
More about Today’s Scriptures

This week’s readings call us to repentance. The prophet Isaiah announces that God is coming to deliver and comfort—prepare the way! The author of 2 Peter tells us to prepare for this coming by living in holiness and devotion. In the gospel, John the baptizer proclaims “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 4).

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

This reading serves as a prologue to chapters 40–66, sometimes called by scholars “the book of the consolation of Israel” because of this opening passage. It is both as an account of a new calling and as a statement of the major themes of the rest of the book.

“In Greek, the root meaning of repentance is not the confession of a sin but a change of mind.”
—Tertullian

The voice announces that the salvation of exiled Israel is imminent, the nation’s “penalty” (v. 2), that is, its time of compulsory servitude in exile, is over. Now the people are invited to receive both deliverance and restoration.

Unlike other instances of the highway image in Isaiah, where the people journey on a path prepared by God, this highway is prepared for God’s travel. Verses 3-4 reflect the practice of sending messengers ahead of visiting royalty. The prophet shows that the comfort due to God’s people is inextricably linked to God’s presence and the revelation of glory. Joy, fearlessness and comfort result from the supreme “good news”: “Here is your God!” (v. 9). As sovereign ruler and tender shepherd, God comforts the people.

John’s baptism was a sign of one’s repentance and purification by God. Repentance (Greek, metanoia) describes the change of heart demanded by personal conversion—a turning away from sin and a return to loyalty toward God. John promises that the One to come will baptize with the Holy Spirit, pouring out upon all people a new communion with God.

Reflection

The people of Jerusalem must pass through the Jordan, just as the Hebrew people once moved through the Red Sea. Why does this water-passage symbol recur in today’s gospel?

One explanation: in ancient times there were no clear borders marked on maps, with signs and entry posts to check identification. Instead, the rivers, mountains and lakes formed boundaries between countries or tribes. “Move through the waters that separate,” Jesus says. “Go beyond a narrow mentality dividing them and us.”

As Mark 1:1 says, this is indeed “good news.” All the stupid barriers humans erect between each other, based on ethnicity, gender, age, social class, sexual orientation, education, income—all these fall before Christ. The invitation to us, then, is: “Forget bigotry. Hear astonishing good news.”
We live in a contemporary desert, a wasteland where the poor are ignored, the salaries of CEOs skyrocket, and precious resources are thoughtlessly wasted. What is asked of us now is what was asked by John: repent. We too can direct our lives, as he did, to someone greater. If we think the planets revolve around us and find that we talk endlessly about ourselves, maybe it’s time to shift our sights and point beyond “moi.”

The Scriptures and the Catechism
As the last in a long line of prophets, John the Baptist’s prophecy does not foretell the future but “forthtell” the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Jews (CCC, #50–67, 205–209). Proclaiming the gospel prepares the way for Jesus to appear once again in our world (CCC, #785, 904–07, 2471–74). By recognizing our sinfulness, we know how much we need God to restore our broken relationships and create a new community now (CCC, #210, 1441–42).

Faith Formation and the Arts, Part 2
by Roger W. Hutchison

Personal Experience
In the quiet of evening, I find the time and space to paint. My little girl and my wife are asleep. My dog Scout is curled up on the floor next to my chair. He is chewing rawhide bones or wagging his tail at one of his imaginary friends. I mostly sit at the kitchen table. I do not have a studio or designated art space. Sometimes I take my art supplies to the back porch. Sometimes I sit on the floor in our garage. I can’t stay in one place. I am inspired by movement. I am inspired by life. Sometimes there is music. There is certainly chocolate—and maybe a tall glass of milk.

Painting is the way I talk to God. I find joy when I move my fingers or paint brushes through puddles of color and across a blank canvas. I am always surprised and blessed by the conversation that takes place. For me, this conversation began at church as a child. I started out in the Baptist church, and one of the lasting memories I have was the biblical landscape mural that loomed over the baptismal pool. I often imagined walking beside Jesus as he headed down to the riverside looking for John the Baptist.

Watching young children create is the closest I come to pure joy…clumsy fingers, open minds and determined focus. Some children work and work and work, the colors spreading across the page filling the emptiness with imagination incarnate. Another child draws three lines and a scribble. “It is my family…” he says with a smile, his eyes twinkling with a holy joy.

We must infuse this holy joy in all that we teach our children, youth and adults. When given the chance to experience this joy, we experience hope. We feel loved. We are no longer afraid. We meet Christ face to face. We learn that we are an integral part of the story.

The World of the Bible
Baptism of Repentance
Baptism means to immerse or wash in water and so becomes a natural sign for ritual purity or holiness. In Judaism, there were many ceremonial washings either in preparation for celebrating a ritual or as part of a cleansing rite within a ritual. Thus John the Baptist uses a baptism of repentance (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4) to symbolize one’s desire to put off sinful ways and live as God wants.

But for Christians, going under the baptismal waters also signified a death to one’s whole former life and an emergence into the new life in the risen Christ. Baptism replaced Jewish circumcision as the initiation ritual and sign of covenant belonging. This also meant that covenant membership was also open to women and not only men who could be circumcised.

Because we tend to limit the meaning of repentance to being sorry for something, repentance is a somewhat inadequate translation of the Greek word metanoia, which describes the more basic change of mind and heart and attitude demanded by personal conversion. It demands a re-forming of our self and our life by turning toward God and away from the evil forces that dominate our world. It is a life-long challenge to order ourselves and our world according to the vision and values of Jesus and live out the obligations of belonging to his community of disciples.