Lamb of God

Like the first disciples, we too follow Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ.

♦ Two disciples of John the Baptist decide to follow Jesus, the Lamb of God.
♦ Young children like to follow those who love them. We are the face of Jesus to the children to whom we minister.
♦ Today’s session invites young children to explore following Jesus through story and play.

Question of the Week
If you saw Jesus coming towards you as John did, what would you say?

Scripture
John 1:29-41
Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Children play Follow Me, a variation of Simon Says, as preparation for hearing today’s story. (You can also simply play Follow the Leader as your first activity.)

Stand in front of the group. Ask children to make the same motions you do only when you say, “Follow me.” Try several motions, such as clapping your hands twice, standing on one foot or turning around in place as you say, “Follow me.” Occasionally try to trick the children with silly phrases such as, “Schnoozle me” or “Wimwag me.”

As soon as children catch on to the game, ask children to take turns leading. Then gather children in the storytelling area. Use the word follow as you recall funny or challenging events of the game; for example, say, “It was funny to follow Jan by sticking our tongues out,” or “When was it hard to follow?”

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Follow Jesus!

Story Focus: If you made story figures in the session for the Baptism of the Lord, use them as a focal point for today’s story, too.

“Jesus is coming!” John the Baptist tells his friends. Andrew listens closely. “Jesus is coming to bring light wherever it’s dark. Jesus is coming to bring peace wherever there’s hurt. Jesus is coming to bring good news to God’s people.”

John’s friends look for Jesus. They want to follow him.

“Look, Andrew!” John suddenly points down the road. “Here comes Jesus. Here comes the one God chooses.”

Andrew runs to follow Jesus.

Jesus says to him, “Hello. Would you like to come to my house today?”

“Yes!” says Andrew. He spends the day with Jesus. Then Andrew runs to his brother Simon.

Andrew says, “Simon, Simon, I’ve found Jesus. He’s the one we’ve been waiting for. He’s the one God chooses. Come meet Jesus.”

Simon runs with Andrew. And they both follow Jesus from that day on, forever and ever.

Story-Review Game (5-15 minutes)

Children play an active game based on today’s story. Ask a child to be John the Baptist. The children scatter around the room, until John the Baptist points to one child and says, “There’s Jesus!”

All the children then scurry to line up behind Jesus as quickly as possible. The children follow Jesus as he or she leads them once around the room, skipping, hopping, etc. Choose a new John the Baptist to continue play.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Invite a child by saying:

◆ (Child’s name), will you come and follow Jesus?

If the child wants to participate in this activity, help the child take the first place in line. Ask this child to invite another child to follow Jesus.

Continue until all the children who answer “yes” stand in line. Then march around the room singing a song from today’s Singing Together or a traditional favorite of children, such as “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know.”

Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to group members as they depart (or e-mail it to families after the session).
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a simple booklet version of today’s story. You can help children assemble these booklets, or invite them to take them home as a project to complete with their families.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
- “Walk in God’s Ways” (p. 7 of the songbook, also available as an MP3)
- “I Will Serve God” (p. 8 of the songbook)

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

Free-Play Center (5-15 minutes)
Jesus’ House
Activity Soundtrack: Play Mozart’s “Alleluia.” (Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.) This classical solo has the joyful, playful quality that has endeared Mozart to musicians and theologians alike. As Karl Barth wrote, Mozart’s music is “a glorious upsetting of the balance, a turning in which the light rises and the shadows fall…in which the Yes rings louder than the ever-present No.” This same quality makes Mozart’s music especially accessible to children.

Invite children to help you turn a corner of the room into Jesus’ house. The easiest way is to drape a sheet over a child-sized table or over a grouping of chairs.

As you work together, ask the children what they do when they go to visit at a friend’s house. What kinds of things might Andrew have done when he visited Jesus at his house? Invite two to three children at a time to play at “Jesus’ house.”

If the children enjoy this play house, you can make such a place available for regular free play. You never need provide more than a sheet over a table or over a grouping of chairs.

Craft (5-15 minutes)
Game Toy
To create this game toy, hold two sticks in the shape of a cross. Wind yarn around the intersection of the cross. Invite children to add ribbons, bows, jingle bells, etc. to the cross for decoration. (Thread jingle bells with rubber bands for easy attachment.)

Form a line with the children. Hand the decorated cross to the first child in line; this child becomes Jesus. Jesus leads the children around the room; children follow, imitating whatever movements Jesus makes.

After 2-3 moves, ask the first leader to pass the cross to the next child in line and go to the end of the line. The child with the cross becomes the next Jesus.

Following Jesus Poster (5-15 minutes)
This session, along with several to follow, invite us to follow Jesus. You can make this invitation concrete for preschoolers and kindergartners by introducing a Following Jesus Poster activity that will be used in ongoing sessions, attached to this document. Cut the
poster in two and tape together to make a four-part poster of children following Jesus on a road.

Gather children around the poster. Point to the first part of the poster. Ask:

- Who do you see in the picture? (Jesus)
- What else do you see in the picture?
- We can pretend that we are following Jesus on this road.
- Each time we do a project together, we will add stickers to this poster.
- We have already done today’s project—we have played a game about following Jesus. Because we played so well together, we can each put a sticker on the poster.

Help each child choose a sticker to add to the poster. Save the poster to use in future sessions.

What if the game did not go as well as you had hoped? Should you still give out the praise and stickers? We believe the answer is yes. When young children are praised for certain behaviors, they are eager to respond with more of the same.

In one intriguing study, researchers worked with two elementary school classes. One class was exhorted regularly to pick up litter and take care of their surroundings. The other class was simply told that they were an especially tidy class who did a great job of taking care of things. The class that was named caring acted caring; they outscored the others on measures of environmental awareness and actions. The same tools of affirmation can work wonders in a catechetical setting. After all, this is God’s own method of dealing with God’s people! First God calls us beloved, chosen, friends—God’s very own. Then God invites our creative responses of love and service.

Fingerplay (5-15 minutes)

Teach children this rhymed version of today’s story.

Here are many people,  
(Hold up the fingers on one hand.)

Who laugh and talk and play.  
(Wiggle fingers.)

And here is John the Baptist  
(Hold up one finger of the other hand.)

Who comes to them to say,  
(Move that finger back and forth in front of other fingers.)

“Come and follow Jesus.  
(Beaton with “John-the-Baptist” finger.)

Follow him today!”  
(Beaton toward you with both hands.)

Young Children and the Gospel

In today’s gospel, John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God.” What does this mean to young children at the fanciful, imaginative stage of cognitive development? They may think that Jesus actually becomes a lamb in some magical way. We still choose to introduce such symbols; familiarity with Christian symbols forms part of a young child’s experience of the Church. For today’s gospel, however, we prefer to focus on the experience of John and his disciples.

John recognizes Jesus and points him out to his disciples; the disciples immediately follow Jesus. After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew seeks out Simon, who will become Peter, that most impulsive and devoted of disciples.

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 the story told in today’s Core Session—Follow Jesus.
  - A printable page with optional Lamb of God Games, as well as Lamb of God Patterns to use with the games.
  - The Following Jesus Poster, to be used in the activity of the same name.
  - 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 Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Winter-A’s Models of the Faith.
  - A printable article for catechists taking a closer look at Paul’s Corinthian Letters.
  - A printable article titled Agnus Dei, exploring in greater detail what it means that Jesus is the Lamb of God.
  - An article examining Using Poetry in Faith Formation.
  - The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings invite us to reflect on the themes of Jesus’ public ministry. In Isaiah, we hear how God works through a chosen servant to bring salvation to all. Paul rejoices in our common fellowship in God’s own anointed, the Christ. Jesus’ public ministry begins as two of John the Baptist’s disciples heed their teacher’s testimony and choose to follow Jesus.

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6
Today’s reading is the second of the four servant songs. In this song, the servant is the speaker. He testifies that his vocation was established before birth, and that his mission is not to Israel alone, but to the Gentile nations as well. This sense of the new Israel was appropriated by the Church (Acts 13:47, 26:23).

1 Corinthians 1:1-3
This reading is the first in a sequence of readings from this letter on the Sundays after Epiphany. Paul uses the standard introductory form of ancient letters when he identifies the sender and the recipients, followed by a greeting and thanksgiving.

The thanksgiving previews the themes of the letter. Paul gives thanks for the spiritual gifts, “speech” and “knowledge” (v. 5), that caused so much division and dissension in the Corinthian community. He will later deal with the misunderstanding and misuse of these gifts (in chapters 12 and 14), but they are undoubtedly God-given, the confirmation of “the testimony of Christ” (v. 6), that is, the preaching of the gospel.

John 1:29-34
Today’s reading represents the fourth gospel’s version of the baptism of Jesus and the calling of the first disciples, with an emphasis on the meaning of the events. John witnesses to Jesus by conferring on him a set of titles, the first being “the Lamb of God” (v. 29). For the author, this term points to the suffering servant of Isaiah and to the Passover lamb as a symbol for the death of Christ. In submitting to baptism, Jesus marks his vocation to an atoning death.

Jesus is the One on whom the Spirit descends and remains, evidence that he is the Messiah. The word for “remain, stay, abide, dwell” (v. 32) is one of the author’s favorite terms. It connotes the permanency of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Unlike the prophets, to whom the Spirit was a temporary gift, Jesus receives and retains the Spirit and then gives it to others, so that they too may enter that abiding relationship.

In this story of the calling of the first disciples, Jesus takes the initiative by turning and asking the two disciples what they are searching for. They reply by asking for the abiding place, the permanence, they cannot find elsewhere. He responds with the invitation that we also long to hear, “Come and see” (v. 39).

Reflection
Today’s gospel sounds the three themes of John’s gospel in Jesus’ first words there. “What are you looking for?” he asks. The disciples respond, “Where are you staying?” and Jesus answers: “Come and see.” John’s gospel opens with Jesus as an adult—no infancy narrative. He is caught up in the pursuit of the beloved—with the two disciples as inadvertent first representatives.

How often in our own lives has a seemingly innocent question led to dramatic consequences? Think, for instance, of the opening lines most people use to start a conversation. Few suspect that “You come here often?” or “Where you from?” would lead to, “Do you take this man/woman to be your lawfully wedded husband/wife?”

So those original questions are answered at the end of John’s gospel, with an echo of the first. In the garden outside his tomb, Jesus asks Mary, “Whom do you seek?” (20:15). When he answers later with her name, she hears what all humans seek: God pronouncing our names in love. Whatever else we yearn for—career, relationship, home, etc.—this supersedes, gives us substance, answers our anxieties. Consider reflecting on this question as a prayer every day for a week. Then listen for the answer: your name said in love.
The Scriptures and the Catechism

The readings today are the first of a series that are particularly related to our growth as disciples (CCC, #823–29). Today we learn that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, but his idea of messianic work is only understood against the backdrop of Isaiah’s picture of a Suffering Servant (CCC, #601, 713). John the Baptist testifies about Jesus’ empowerment by the Holy Spirit for his coming ministry. Our reception of the sacrament of confirmation empowers us with special gifts for our participation with Jesus in his mission of salvation (CCC, #1285–89, 1302–05).

The World of the Bible

Discipleship in John’s Gospel

John stresses Jesus’ divinity as God’s Son and the community’s equality as Jesus’ friends. More than any other gospel, John focuses on the intimate relationship of Jesus the Son to God the Father.

Jesus is the Word of God, the revealer of the mystery of God in our midst. He has been sent from God to show us who God is and what God wants. He can do this because of his personal experience and special relationship with God. He teaches in long speeches and performs distinctive signs that help us understand his message. Before he returns, he gives us the Holy Spirit to carry on his work and abide with us always in his place.

Jesus calls disciples into intimacy with him and so with God. His disciples are no longer merely pupils, but “friends” (15:15). John’s community is a group conscious of its intimate relationship to Jesus, as Jesus’ words at the last supper make clear. They are a community of Jesus’ friends who share the life of Jesus because they share the Holy Spirit. They are characterized by their love for one another. They are to love as Jesus has loved them—a love that is not only intimate but which gives everything for the beloved. Jesus’ death is the ultimate sign of his love.

A mysterious figure appears in John’s gospel. This “beloved disciple” is the model of loving friendship for John’s congregation. The “beloved disciple” is so intimate with Jesus that he can rest his head on Jesus at the last supper (13:23).

In contrast to Peter, he faithfully follows Jesus during the passion, even getting Peter into the courtyard of the High Priest (18:15). Although Peter denies Jesus and runs away, the beloved disciple stands at the foot of the cross (19:26). Jesus entrusts the care of his mother to the beloved disciple. After the resurrection, the beloved disciple more quickly believes in the resurrection (20:8) and also recognizes the mysterious risen Lord (21:7).

The Sung Praise of Israel

The Soul of a People

by Kathy McGovern

A visit to Rome can be an astonishing experience. Here the traveler will find enough sacred art and architecture to exhaust the most intrepid pilgrim. But for the pure sadness of it all, nothing beats the Arch of Titus, the victory bridge through which the conquering Roman soldiers paraded the spoils of war and human trophies from their latest campaign.

One of the drawings on the arch portrays the triumphant destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE), after which the treasures of the Jerusalem temple—menorah, gold lamp stands, gold and silver—and the priests and soldiers who had sought to protect the city, were marched into Rome for humiliation and annihilation. There on the stone, next to the drawings of the liturgical treasures that represented two thousand years of Hebrew prayer, is a drawing of a Jewish trumpet—the herald of Israel’s praise. This must have been a particularly sweet trophy, for surely when Titus captured Israel’s music, he captured the soul of Israel itself.

Psalm 137:3 tells us that the exiled Jews, living in Babylon five centuries earlier, had been teased by their captors to display what they were known for in the ancient world: their sung praise. “Sing us one of the songs of Zion,” they begged. But the Jews, far away from their homes and their temple (smoldering and ruined after the assault of Nebuchadnezzar), had no heart for singing, which is to say they had no heart at all.

The World of the Bible

Discipleship in John’s Gospel

John stresses Jesus’ divinity as God’s Son and the community’s equality as Jesus’ friends. More than any other gospel, John focuses on the intimate relationship of Jesus the Son to God the Father.

Jesus is the Word of God, the revealer of the mystery of God in our midst. He has been sent from God to show us who God is and what God wants. He can do this because of his personal experience and special relationship with God. He teaches in long speeches and performs distinctive signs that help us understand his message. Before he returns, he gives us the Holy Spirit to carry on his work and abide with us always in his place.

Jesus calls disciples into intimacy with him and so with God. His disciples are no longer merely pupils, but “friends” (15:15). John’s community is a group conscious of its intimate relationship to Jesus, as Jesus’ words at the last supper make clear. They are a community of Jesus’ friends who share the life of Jesus because they share the Holy Spirit. They are characterized by their love for one another. They are to love as Jesus has loved them—a love that is not only intimate but which gives everything for the beloved. Jesus’ death is the ultimate sign of his love.

A mysterious figure appears in John’s gospel. This “beloved disciple” is the model of loving friendship for John’s congregation. The “beloved disciple” is so intimate with Jesus that he can rest his head on Jesus at the last supper (13:23).

In contrast to Peter, he faithfully follows Jesus during the passion, even getting Peter into the courtyard of the High Priest (18:15). Although Peter denies Jesus and runs away, the beloved disciple stands at the foot of the cross (19:26). Jesus entrusts the care of his mother to the beloved disciple. After the resurrection, the beloved disciple more quickly believes in the resurrection (20:8) and also recognizes the mysterious risen Lord (21:7).