Scripture
Matthew 5:13-16

Being Salt and Light

Jesus invites us to be salt and light for those around us.

- Jesus describes the true righteousness that brings glory to our Father in heaven.
- Today’s session offers preschoolers and kindergartners stories and activities built around the symbol of light.
- Children experiment with light.

Question of the Week
How can I surprise someone with unexpected goodness this week?

Core Session
- Getting Started (flashlights, kaleidoscopes, prisms, lenses, colored cellophane)
- Gospel Story: Let Your Light Shine
- Song: “This Little Light of Mine”
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Art: Sun Masks (sun mask template)
- Game: Tap or Clap (flashlight)
- Costume Play (costume materials, props)
- Following Jesus Poster (stickers)
- Info: Managing Expectations
- Music and Movement: We See God’s Light
- 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
- The Sung Praise of Israel: Songs of Thanksgiving
- The World of the Bible: Salt
Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Note: This activity calls for materials that you will need to gather before the session. Even if you use only flashlights, you will probably need to borrow several to have enough for the children in your class.

In the session, welcome children and set out a collection of flashlights as well as a selection of toys that involve light (kaleidoscopes, prisms, unbreakable lenses, colored cellophane). Invite children to experiment with the materials. Let them explore making light, changing light, blocking light, etc.

After time for free play; gather children together and ask:

◆ What things give light?
◆ What can we do with a lamp? in the sun? with a flashlight? with a candle?

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Let Your Light Shine

As you tell this story, light the chosen item. Keep it before you as you tell the first two paragraphs of the story. As you tell the paragraph that starts with the sentence, “Jesus teaches his friends,” move the light around the circle of children, letting the light shine briefly on each child. If you have a very large group, simply hold the light in front of several randomly chosen children.

God says to Jesus, “You are the light of the world. Bring light wherever there is darkness. Bring peace wherever there is hurt. Bring good news to my people.”

Jesus comes to us. Jesus hugs children on his lap and says, “I love you.” Jesus heals children who are sick and sad. Jesus tells us all, “God loves you. God loves you forever and ever.”

Jesus teaches his friends. He says, “you are the light of the world. Bring light wherever there’s hurt. Bring good news to God’s people.”

The friends of Jesus go. The friends of Jesus bring food to the hungry. The friends of Jesus hold close those people who are sick and dying. The friends of Jesus tell everyone, “God loves you. God loves you, forever and ever.”

Song (5-10 minutes)

Teach children the song, “This Little Light of Mine.”

This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go
I’m gonna let it shine.
Everywhere I go
I’m gonna let it shine.
Everywhere I go
I’m gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Every day and night,
I’m gonna let it shine.
Every day and night,
I’m gonna let it shine.
Every day and night,
I’m gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Stand in a circle with children. Point to one child and say, “(Name of child), you are a light of the world.” Invite that child to repeat your words and actions for another child.

Continue until all children have been named as lights of the world. Close by praying:

◆ Thank you God, for sending Jesus to be the Light of the world. Thank you, Jesus for making us lights of the world, too. Help us, Holy Spirit, to spread the light of Jesus everywhere. Amen.

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)
On page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find the words for the simple story-review song used in the core session. For parents this will be a fun reminder of a classic from their childhood.

On page 2 of Discover you’ll find an engaging light game that parents and families can play at home as well as some helpful tips for parents on building self esteem and self worth.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
- “The Light of God” (p. 26 of the songbook)
- “You are a Temple” (p. 28 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.

You can also play for children the African-American spiritual “Down by the Riverside,” sung by the Blind Boys of Alabama. (Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

“Down by the Riverside” is easy to sing along with. Its imagery, drawn from the prophet Isaiah, ties together the Advent promises of God’s new world with the sacrament of baptism. Invite children to make up movements to accompany each verse.

Art (15 minutes)
Sun Masks
Before the session download the sun mask template, attached to this document. Create from yellow construction paper sun masks, 1 per child.

In the session, invite children to decorate masks using crayons, colored pencils or markers. Once decorated, punch holes and reinforce them with pieces of tape or stick-on reinforcements. Attach strings or elastic to the masks so that they can be worn, or mount the mask on a large craft stick or paint stir stick.

Game (15 minutes)
Tap or Clap
Children play a game with light. Darken the room. Tell children that you are going to turn a flashlight on and off. When the light is on, children can jump up and down and clap. When the light is off, children must crouch down and be quiet.

You may choose to invite different children to be the Leader of the game, being in charge of the light and suggesting the specific activity (hopping, twirling, dancing). Provide assistance as needed.

Costume Play (15 minutes)
Shining God’s Light
Provide children with a variety of dress-up materials to facilitate costume free play. Invite children to dress like a particular person, character or profession, for example: doctor, teacher, police officer, mother, father, etc.

Ask each child to show the group something that their chosen person does, or can do, that helps us know who they are—a firefighter might rush into a burning building; a teacher might stand in front of a class. As you watch, describe the valuable contribution each character makes, and tell how important that contribution is to all of us. Connect the contribution back to things you’ve observed in the child’s own personality. “You are very patient, you might be a good teacher.” “You are a fast runner, you could be a good football player.”

As interest allows, invite children to create stories where their different characters interact in some way—the firefighter visits the school; a football player goes to the doctor. Allow children to create the story in their own way, and according to their own agenda. Your job is to listen and witness their creation, adding only enough input to keep the action going and growing.

Following Jesus Poster (5-15 minutes)
Continue the Following Jesus Poster activity. In today’s activity, we help children identify ways of helping others as we follow Jesus.

Gather children around the Following Jesus poster. Point to the fourth picture in the four-part poster. Invite children to talk about the children following Jesus. Ask:
- What are the children in this picture doing? How are they helping? Are these children following Jesus, too?
- We can help others as we follow Jesus on this road.

Invite each child to act out one way to help others as he or she adds a sticker to the poster.
Managing Expectations

We know that the craft projects created by children participating in your sessions may not look anything like the samples you create to share with them as examples. Because adults often want the finished product to look “right” to us, we may have difficulty accepting suns with fierce scowls or scribbled features.

Remember that children bring unique combinations of skills and vision to craft projects. One child may use scissors precisely; another may love to use crayons “with abandon” on every project. We think that encouraging creativity and choice in children is more important than engineering a roomful of perfect sun masks. Allow yourself and the children in your classroom for choice—and for imperfection.

Music and Movement

We See God’s Light

Teach children a liturgical dance performed with unlit candles. Sing these words to the tune of “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”; If you don’t know this tune, simply chant the words in rhythm.

We see God’s light shine in our hearts.
(Child slowly crosses hands over chest.)

We see God’s light shine in our friends.
(Child turns to partner and bows deeply, lowering crossed arms.)

We see God’s light shine in God’s words.
(Child forms overhead circle with arms.)

We see God’s light shine without end.
(Child crosses arms in front of self and touches hands to neighbors.)

Ask children to stand in pairs. Form a circle from the pairs. Each child holds a candle in his or her left hand while making the appropriate dance motions. See below.

Young Children and the Gospel

In today’s gospel reading, Jesus, the light of the world, tells us that we are the light of the world. Today’s lesson offers young children activities built around the symbol of light. We can’t expect young children to penetrate this metaphor as an adult might, but they can experience directly the qualities of light. This experience prepares children to comprehend Jesus’ teaching more fully as they mature.

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—Let Your Light Shine.
  - Sun Mask Template for use in today’s Art activity.
  - Four mini-posters of the movements to accompany the Music and Movement activity at left. The document is titled We See God’s Light Movements.
  - 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 titled Sacred Art around Us.
  - The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings encourage us to become examples for others. Isaiah declares that the way to healing begins with generosity and justice. Paul proclaims nothing but the crucified Christ. Jesus describes the true righteousness that brings glory to our Father in heaven.

Isaiah 58:7-10

This passage addresses Israel’s reliance on external practices of piety as empty rituals that sought merely to manipulate God and gain God’s approval.

Today’s verses are part of a longer section in which God redefines the role of fasting. An expression of humility, fasting offers the people an opportunity to do for others what God has already done for them, freeing the captives, feeding the hungry and bringing Israel’s homeless back to their homeland.

True spiritual practice attracts God’s attention and results in a new exodus. Verse 8 is reminiscent of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, when a pillar of cloud guided them by day and a pillar of fire guarded them by night.

The attitude of the heart and use of the tongue must also reflect charity. The people must give more than food, clothing or shelter: they must give themselves. Instead of seeking their own pleasure, they must first satisfy the desires of the needy, finding their own desires satisfied by God.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul now takes the principle he developed in 1:18-25—that “God’s foolishness is wiser than human strength”—and illustrates it in himself. Both his own physical unimpressiveness and his style of proclaiming the gospel made it clear that the power of the gospel was not Paul’s doing, but was from the power of God.

Though Paul was certainly aware of the oratorical techniques of the day, he disclaims these ploys to influence or persuade. The content of his message alone had the power to convince and transform his listeners as the Spirit penetrated their hearts and minds with the truth of the gospel message.

Matthew 5:13-16

Matthew follows the Beatitudes with two sayings, one on salt and one on light. Salt was used as a preservative and as a purifier of sacrifices. From the custom of making a covenant by eating a meal seasoned with salt came its use as a figure for preserving the covenant. The images of both salt and light also described the law. Light also referred to God and then to the restored Israel after the exile.

In the following sections (5:21-48), Jesus explains the true intent of the law, peeling back the legalism that had become encrusted over the spirit of the call to righteousness. The law that expressed true righteousness (that is, our right relation to God) must penetrate the heart, governing every part of our human life. Such a holiness is only possible for those who live in Christ, as described in the Beatitudes.

Reflection

You are salt. You are light. Jesus’ statements are astonishingly direct. Not “you may be,” or “you are on good days,” or “if you improve…” Here, now, whatever you may think of yourself, no matter how much others criticize you, you are vital to the life of the world.

How vital is hard to measure until we understand that to the ancients salt was necessary for everything from seasoning and preserving food to making covenants. Matthew is equally direct about the rejection of flavorless salt. He even intensifies throwing it out by trampling it underfoot.

Scripture scholar John Meier reminds us that there are two facets of the light image: it is meant for all, and it can be smothered only by the disciples’ own failure. In a one-room, windowless house, the lamp would stand in a central place where its rays could extend as far as possible. To extinguish the flame without sparks, the homeowner would place another vessel over the lamp. That thought can prompt self-examination: how do we undercut our own mission? How do we dim our light by lack of confidence, preoccupation with lesser things or a failure to believe?

No one would argue that our world often seems murky and flat. It’s hard to see ourselves as the world’s best hope for color and flavor. We are like Paul, filled with weakness, fear and trembling. We have no particular eloquence or wisdom. Yet to perceive our limits is to recognize something beyond them, to another working through us. Whatever we do comes through the power of Christ and is a tribute to him.
**The Scriptures and the Catechism**

Jesus recognizes that our good example as disciples is essential for our task of evangelization. We are not merely to proclaim the word but we must also live it by doing the works of mercy described by Isaiah (CCC, #2443–49). Truth must become a hallmark of our lives as the eighth commandment demands (CCC, #2464–70, 2475–87). Paul reminds us that it is not our sophisticated eloquence or slick marketing techniques that will sell the gospel. The gospel works because of the power of the Spirit who works through us. With the Spirit’s help, we can be salt and light for today.

**The World of the Bible**

**Salt**

Salt has many uses and, like other natural compounds, salt can be used negatively or positively. The Bible’s writers made generous use of salt imagery, sprinkling references to its use and abuse throughout Scripture. Biblical writers are well aware of salt’s properties, associating it with images of seasoning, preserving and purifying—or with powerful images of death, desolation and curse.

Salt was used as a purifier of sacrifices (Ezekiel 43:24). References to the covenant of salt capitalize on salt’s preserving qualities as symbolic of a permanent indissoluble relationship between God and his people (Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5). Salt is listed as a required addition to all burnt offerings because of its preserving qualities (Ezra 6:9).

Spreading salt on a captured city symbolized a curse (Judges 9:45). Salt in the soil would inhibit the growth of food crops. Ezekiel contrasts salt marshes and swamps with fertile freshwater sources capable of growing all kinds of trees whose leaves will not wither. In his vision of a flourishing and vibrant Dead Sea, salt is so essential that marshes remain for its production (Ezekiel 47:11).

By his use of salt imagery, Jesus establishes that the life of Christians is vital to this world. Without the Christian element, life becomes bland and dismal. Furthermore, Jesus does not say mildly, “you are like salt,” nor does he say that in a long and gradual process, we will become salt. At this very moment, we are these precious elements, and we are expected to show that reality in our works.

**The Sung Praise of Israel**

**Songs of Thanksgiving**

*by Kathy McGovern*

When Israel thanks God, it’s through music, music, music. In fact, Psalm 57 implies that Israel’s sung praise gets the sun up in the morning: “I will sing and make melody. Awake my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn” (7-8). Even the sun and moon respond to the call of morning praise.

Jonah sings a hymn of thanks for his deliverance from the belly of the beast (Jonah 2). It’s interesting that he doesn’t start out the way we would imagine someone just swallowed by a big fish might start—God! Help! Now!—but instead with an astonishing confidence in the way the story is going to turn out: “I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice” (2:2). It’s fun to imagine this psalm as it might have been played at the temple—perhaps cymbals for the splash in the water, horns for the sound of the fish, then soft stringed instruments for Jonah’s time of repentance and trust inside its belly.

Probably King Hezekiah’s psalm of thank-offering for deliverance from death (Isaiah 38:10-20) was originally a liturgical song of thanks performed at the temple by worshippers grateful for a particular healing. And how does the grateful person show God proper gratitude? The end of the hymn says, “The Lord will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our lives…” (20).