Scripture
John 18:33b-37

Paradoxical King

Pilate questions the kingship of Jesus.
- In today’s gospel, Jesus’ trial before Pontius Pilate puts into sharp contrast human and divine images of power.
- Like Jesus on trial, children around the world give us an image of God’s power seen in weakness.
- In today’s session children explore different understandings of the word king as they celebrate our king: Jesus.

Question of the Week
To what extent and in what ways does Christ reign over my days?

Core Session
- Getting Started
- Gospel Story: King Jesus
- Letters to Jesus (rubber stamps, stamp pads, stickers, glue, sugar)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Welcome the Good News
- Singing Together
- Bible Skills for Third Graders
- Making Banners (felt, fabric scraps, dowel, fabric markers, glue, trim)
- Info: Beginning Spellers
- Info: King Talk
- Info: Children and the Gospels
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
- More about Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- The Feast of Christ the King
- The World of the Bible: The Kingdom of God
Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Explain that Jesus is our King. That means that Jesus cares for us and we follow Jesus.

Invite children to play a game of following King Jesus. Ask children to sit and close their eyes. Explain that whoever you touch will be King Jesus. Emphasize that no one else will know who King Jesus is.

At your signal the children open their eyes and begin to move around the room, looking for King Jesus. King Jesus moves around the room, too. Whenever King Jesus winks at a child, that child begins following King Jesus.

As soon as other children realize who King Jesus is, they follow, too, until all the children are following King Jesus. Repeat with a new volunteer.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

King Jesus

When Jesus rides to Jerusalem town,
He wears no robes, he wears no crown.
But the people know that he’s our king.
“Hosanna, Jesus,” they shout and sing.

Jesus hears, but his head bows down.
Hard times wait in Jerusalem town.
Soldiers search for Jesus by night.
They drag him to the palace by morning’s light.

The governor asks, “Are you a king?
Is it true what your people shout and sing?
Here you stand without a crown.
Do you think you can rule in Jerusalem town?”

Jesus says, “I need no crown.
I will not rule in Jerusalem town.
I speak God’s truth. I show God’s love.
That’s why I was sent by God above.”

The governor knows no pity, no love.
He cares nothing for God above.
Jesus carries his cross to a distant hill,
The people weep. Jesus loves them still.

Without any soldiers, without any crown,
King Jesus stands in Jerusalem town.

Letters to Jesus (5-15 minutes)

Children write letters to King Jesus. Ask:
◆ What kind of a king do you think Jesus is?
◆ Why is it good news that Jesus is coming?

Distribute writing materials and invite each child to write a letter (or draw a picture) to King Jesus. Ask the children to tell Jesus (or show Jesus) why they want him to come quickly.

Children can embellish their letters in one of these ways:
◆ by stamping designs on the letter, either singly or repeatedly to make a border
◆ by decorating the letters with stickers
◆ by brushing the letters thinly with glue and sprinkling them with sugar, so that the letters sparkle when dry

You can help beginning spellers write more fluently by using one or more of these techniques:
◆ by inviting the children to use any spelling that “looks” right to them, and then accepting the invented results
◆ by writing any words requested by a child on chalkboard or newsprint, so other children can use the word, too
◆ by encouraging children to ask each other for help

Save the letters to use in today’s closing prayer.

Note: To make homemade stamps and stamp pads, saturate folded paper towels in styrofoam food trays with tempera paint. The children use plastic knives to etch a design in potato halves. Use a real knife to carve away the excess potato from the designs.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Ask the children to take turns reading aloud the letters they wrote to King Jesus. After each letter, invite the children to respond by praying in unison, “Amen. Come, King Jesus.”

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.
Welcome the Good News
(5-10 minutes)
Today’s Welcome the Good News has today’s story to share with children. You’ll also find questions for the children to use in meditating on Jesus our King along with a rebus puzzle.

Children will also find an activity called With Your Family that they can lead at home.

(Note: You have the option of e-mailing Welcome the Good News directly to children’s homes instead of printing it.)

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Jesus Is the King” (songbook p. 18)

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

You can also invite children to imagine Jesus riding into town as you play “Ode II Joy.” (Open your Fall-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.) Children can draw or paint as the music plays, perhaps painting together on one long strip of mural paper taped to a work surface.

Bible Skills for Third Graders
(10-15 minutes)
Invite third graders to take turns leading today’s Bible Skills activity.

Help the children use the table of contents in their Bibles to find the book of John. Help them use the chapter and verse numbers to find John 18:37. Ask children to follow along in their Bibles as you read aloud the verse.

Set a chair at the front of the room. Invite the children to take turns being the leader, sitting in the chair and asking one question of the other children.

For example, the leader can ask the other children a question about today’s verse or can ask the children to find the first word of a different book or chapter.

Making Banners
Children make a banner of crowns to celebrate Jesus as our King. The banner might be carried in today’s processional or hung in either the room or a public part of your parish.

Distribute felt rectangles, fabric glue, fabric markers, scissors, fabric scraps and stick-on trim. Invite children to cut crowns from felt to glue onto a long strip of felt. Children can decorate the crowns with the markers, scraps and trim.

Ask children to invent a title for the banner; for example:
◆ Jesus Is Our King.

Use fabric markers to write the title across the top of the felt strip. Leave enough felt at the top to fold over a dowel.

Fold the felt over the dowel and glue the fold in place. Ask the children to glue their finished crowns to the strip of felt.
Beginning Spellers

In today’s story response activity, we invite children to write letters to Jesus. Although we give drawing pictures as an alternative for children who don’t want to write, even just-beginning spellers can write letters with the right support.

Help beginning spellers write more fluently by using one or more of these techniques:

◆ Invite the children to use any spelling that “looks” right to them, and then accept the invented results.
◆ Write any words requested by a child on the board or newsprint, so other children can use the word, too
◆ Encourage children to ask each other for help, but don’t insist. Some children prefer to get discreet help from a peer, while other children prefer adult help.

King Talk

Kings are not an ordinary part of modern American life. If time allows, begin today’s session with a leisurely talk about kings in stories or rhymes. Share with the children traditional Mother Goose rhymes, such as “Old King Cole” and “Sing a Song of Sixpence.”

Children might remember Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak (New York: Harper, 1963) as a picture book from their childhood. After the rhymes and stories, ask, “What do you think it would be like to be king? What do you think a good king does?”

Throughout the session, you can pause to invite children to think about Jesus is like these kings and how Jesus is different from these kings.

Children and the Gospel

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells his disciples of the mysterious signs of his coming again. Although the signs themselves are troubling to our ears, the underlying message is one of affirmation: Jesus will come again, in the glory of God that wants to save all people. For children, the message of today’s gospel is best kept simple: Jesus is coming.

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 Story Review Game based on today’s theme of Christ the King.
  — A Crown Pattern you can use to make crowns for today’s Making a Banner activity.
  — A copy of today’s Gospel Story to print or e-mail.
  — A copy of today’s At Home with the Good News to print or e-mail to children and their families.
◆ Open your Fall-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Fall-B’s Models of the Faith.
  — A printable article for catechists titled Learning through the Visual Arts.
  — A helpful article for catechists that explores ways to encourage children’s responses to visual art titled First Impressions.
  — A printable article for catechists titled Learning through Music.
  — Printable articles on Apocalyptic Literature and the Book of Revelation.
  — The Introduction for Primary for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings celebrate the paradoxical kingship of Jesus Christ. In Daniel, the one who comes to reign over creation is, like us, a human. Revelation tells us that our trials and suffering will eventually yield to glory and honor when Jesus’ kingship is revealed. In today’s gospel, when questioned by Pilate, the suffering Jesus accepts the title of king, but asserts that his kingdom is not of “this world.”

Daniel 7:13-14

Today’s reading comes from the vision of the four beasts (7:1-14). Like political cartoonists today, the author uses stylized images to represent the succession of the four pagan world-dominating empires (Babylonians, Medes, Persians and Greeks) as grotesque beasts. God’s judgment on the beasts reveals that God alone is the real power that determines how history proceeds.

After destroying the beasts, God creates the final kingdom, in the form of a human being—which for Jews was the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Here the comparison stresses the human form of the one who represents the universal and everlasting dominion given by God to the people. In Daniel, this human figure probably stands for God’s people (7:18, 27) who will receive the kingdom. Christians have always associated this figure with Jesus.

Revelation 1:5-8

Revelation, (Greek, apocalypse) takes its name from its first verse, which both describes its content and classifies it as the primary Christian example of apocalyptic writing. Today’s reading forms the introduction, which weaves together Old Testament images and themes shaped by the worship experience of the Church. The book is to be read aloud to the worshippers, upon whom the first of seven blessings (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14), is pronounced.

The risen Jesus is identified as a “faithful witness,” literally martyr, “firstborn of the dead” and “ruler of the kings of the earth” (v. 5). His continuing love and his final redemption of his people frees them to fulfill their priestly vocation to celebrate God’s presence in worship.

The divine self-proclamation (v. 8) combines titles of God from the Old Testament as developed in Christian worship. God is Alpha and Omega—first and last, whose existence spans all time. This title is here and in 21:6 applied to God the Father, and in 1:17 and 22:13 to the Son. God is also described as “almighty,” the only attribute that the Christian creed mentions about God the Father.

John 18:33b-37

Jesus’ conversation with Pilate reveals how ambiguous and how volatile the claim of kingship was in a nation under Roman domination. It also continues John’s use of irony—persons like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the Jewish leaders talking with Jesus using the same terms but with different meanings. This allows readers to contrast the two levels of this world and God’s world.

Pilate’s question connects the political title of king with the religious notion of the messiah as the expected national liberator. Jesus’ counter-question seeks to clarify whether Pilate is thinking of kingship in political (Roman) or religious (Jewish) terms. Jesus admits he is a king, but nothing like what Pilate has in mind. His “kingdom” is not “from this world”—it is not determined by, derived from, or grounded in this world.

In the world, Jesus bears witness to the truth—the reality of God, a revelation of truth that has the effect of judgment (7:7). Jesus, not Pilate, is really the judge in this situation. Those who are grounded in the truth listen to Jesus with understanding and acceptance. Pilate tries to remain neutral, to avoid making a decision between the world and truth. But refusing to choose Christ’s light and truth is a choice to serve the world and remain in darkness.
Reflection

Jesus, who has such keen insight and clear consciousness of this world, always sees that reality in light of a larger vision. That viewpoint penetrated the way he saw the crowd who heard the Beatitudes. He looked at people who were sickly, ignorant, grieving, probably smelly and diseased, and told them they would inherit the earth, leap for joy, come into the kingdom. That vision does not fail him when he stands before Pilate, on trial for his life.

He is never triumphalist; indeed, it is Pilate—not himself—who calls him king. Instead, he humbly takes on the death of all mortal humans.

None of us are likely to face inquisition by a Roman ruler. What, then, can we learn from this stark scene? Jesus is the person we want to become. He shows us here how to embrace our humanity with all its limitations. If we forget his humanity, then we risk forgetting our own. But he also shares his vision of ultimate blessing. As the narrator Lily says in The Secret Life of Bees: “there is nothing but mystery in the world; how it hides behind the fabric of our poor browbeat days, shining brightly and we don’t even know it.”

The Scriptures and the Catechism

On the Feast of Christ the King—the one sent by God to exercise Lordship over our world (CCC, #659–79)—we recognize that our world as we know it is now being transformed through God’s power working through us (CCC, #1042–50). We share in Christ’s kingly work (CCC, #908–13) by ordering our world according to Christ’s values. Thus we nurture the growth of Christ’s dominion over ourselves, our families, our nation, our parish and the world.

The Feast of Christ the King

The Church year ends awaiting the return of Christ, when evil will be defeated and Jesus will begin his reign as King of kings. Vatican Council II moved this feast to this final Sunday (from late October where it had been celebrated since 1925) to make it coincide with the ending of the liturgical year.

At our baptism, we were “Christened” to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly tasks of Jesus. The kingly role requires a reordering of our values and relationships. As Vatican II noted, “The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, and how to relate it to the praise of God. They must assist one another to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world is permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieves its purpose in justice, charity, and peace. The laity have the principal role in the universal fulfillment of this purpose” (Constitution on the Church, #36).

Christ’s kingdom begins in the community of people who live in a new and different way because of God’s presence in their lives. This kingdom community will always contrast with earthly political and social systems; we cannot disconnect our relation to God from our relations with others.

The World of the Bible

The Kingdom of God

In his teaching and preaching, Jesus identifies God’s ideal community as the kingdom of God—both the place where God rules and the people who live as God desires. All Jesus’ effort was given to making this kingdom become a reality, first in the hearts and minds of his audience, and then in their everyday lives.

This community is to be characterized by a new way of living together. Jesus’ image of the kingdom community was that of a family in which God alone is King and all humanity—Gentiles and Jews, men and women, rich and poor, masters and slaves—were gathered together under God’s rule. The kingdom is inaugurated by Jesus and continues today in the Christian community that daily tries to make God’s way of being a community into a reality.

The early Christians believed that the struggle between God and Satan for domination of the earth was decisively won by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus was the final agent of God’s judgment and salvation. In him, God’s judgment of all evil empires would soon be carried out, beginning with the fall of the current evil empire, Rome. The downfall of this mightiest of empires would usher in the final restoration of the entire earth as a kingdom ruled by God and ordered with the harmony God intended at its creation.