

Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

The Season After Pentecost is the longest season of the church year, spanning almost half the calendar year. The weeks after Pentecost are called Ordinary Time coming from the word “ordinal” which means counted time. This time is not ordinary as in common or regular, but it is the time of counted weeks between Pentecost and Advent. The liturgical color of the season is green. It is often thought of as a season of growth both in our personal faith and in the life of the church. Common themes to focus on throughout the season are:

- Our relationship with God.
- Our relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another through our prayers, the sacraments and life in the body of Christ.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- The Church and its work for God’s mission.

Notation for this Scripture

The prophet Ezekiel’s ministry happened during a time of great upheaval, beginning in 593 BCE (just before the fall of Jerusalem) through 571 BCE (into the Babylonian exile). Throughout the Book of Ezekiel, we hear a message of judgment, destruction and restoration. Ezekiel is warning of the judgment of the leaders and others who have only worried about themselves or have forgotten the ways of God. Our lesson today is a ray of hope from Ezekiel to those who were in the Babylonian exile, telling them of God’s promise to look for them, gather them, care for them, and bring them home as a shepherd bring the sheep home and tends to them after they have been lost.

Note: This is also the last day in the church year, so Option 2 of the lesson focuses a bit more on that if you wish to help the children prepare for the New Year we begin next Sunday on the First Sunday in Advent.

Theme: Shepherds and Giving Thanks

Before: You will need:

Shepherds: Paper, markers, pens, pencils, art supplies

Giving Thanks: Depending on which activity you choose, you will need long lengths of streamers or ribbon for each child in a color they can write/draw upon, Notecards, nice paper, or watercolor paper, watercolor paints, paintbrushes, envelopes, strips of paper, markers, crayons, pens, stapler or tape.

Beginning: Welcome the children into the room and have them sit in your gathering area. Ask how their week was and what they had for dinner the night before or breakfast that morning.

Opening Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for our time together to listen and learn more about you. Be with us as we hear the words from the prophet Ezekiel and help us to understand that you are always with us, guiding us and caring for us. Amen.*

The Story: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

In the Bible we hear stories of many people. These people are just like us, they eat and sleep, go to school and work. God has a plan for each of them, and in hearing the stories we learn that God's plan is for each of us too.

Read Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what it might mean that the Lord will search for the sheep?
- I wonder who the sheep might be?

- I wonder what this means for us today?

Shepherds

Our lesson from Ezekiel tells us about God being our shepherd. I wonder what a shepherd does? Allow the children time to respond.

God is our shepherd who cares for us, feeds us, and guides us home. When we are injured, God helps to heal us. When we are hungry, we are fed. When are lost, we will be found.

I wonder what would a modern day Shepherd look like? How might that person guide, tend and nurture a group of people? Give the children time to brainstorm what a shepherd might look like in today's world. (This can be done in the large group or in small groups). Is it a teacher, a parent, a grandparent, a tutor, etc. What qualities does this person have?

Give the children paper to draw or create their modern day shepherds.

Gather them back together at the end of class and have them share what they came up with if they feel comfortable and if there is time.

It's the End of the Year, For What Do You Give Thanks?

This is the final session of our church year, so it's like our New Year's Eve! Why would that be? Allow the children time to respond

Next Sunday is the First Sunday in Advent, which marks the beginning of the Church Year. So today is our day to think about the people and things that we want to give thanks for as we think back over the last year.

I wonder, what are some people or things you want to give thanks for? Allow the children time to respond, writing their responses up on the whiteboard or paper.

It is sometimes easy to forget all that we are thankful for and all the things that have blessed us in the last year. Today we are going to create

something that you can take home and string up in your room, so you will remember and continue to give thanks.

Note: there are two activities here. Choose one and let the children have fun thinking about how they want to give thanks.

Streamers of Thanks Give the children a LONG length of streamers or ribbon. Have them write or draw on the full length of the streamer all the people or things they want to give thanks for in their lives. When they are done, have them roll it up around a popsicle stick or something so they can safely transport it home and hang it in their room.

Pictures of Thanks Give the children some nice paper or even notecards to draw thank you notes that they can give to people as a way of appreciating what someone has done for them this past year.

You could also give the children watercolor paper and paints on which to paint their note of thanks.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to clean up their space. Invite them to share what they created.

Closing Prayer: *Almighty God, we give thanks that you are our shepherd, guiding us and caring for us as we venture out into the world. Be with us as we leave this place that we may feel your presence and know you are with us. Amen.*

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the

watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

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