

Isa. 61:10–62:3

Ps. 148

Gal. 4:4–7

Luke 2:22–40

Waiting and Welcoming

Goal for the Session *Children will reenact the story of Jesus' presentation in the temple and examine how the church welcomes them.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Luke 2:22–40

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” William R. Herzog II

Anna's name in the Greek is Hannah. It is important to emphasize this in light of Luke's allusive use of 1 Samuel 1–2, the story of the birth of Samuel to Hannah and Elkanah. What the two events share is the sense that God is doing something new to facilitate the fulfillment of God's purposes in history. Both are transitional events. If Simeon spoke to God and then to Mary and Joseph, Hannah speaks “to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” The Word becomes public in a way it has not been. This means that Anna is more than a distant echo of Simeon, but has her own distinctive role to play.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” James C. Howell

Jesus was just a baby—and this is God's shrewdest device. As Luther put it, God became small for us in Christ; he showed us his heart, so our hearts might be won. Infants wield a kind of power. Muscular men with calloused hands become gentle as pillows when handed a baby; potent people with gruff voices adopt a falsetto and coo to an infant. God came down, not to thrash evildoers or crush the Romans, but as an infant, to elicit love, to nurture tenderness.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” William V. Arnold

Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple for the required Mosaic ritual of purification. The birth of a child, regardless of family resources, brings with it responsibility. Jesus' parents are acknowledging and honoring their faith commitments and their recognition of the special quality of their child. Further, this case reminds us that there are particular rituals available both to remind and to encourage mothers and fathers in their new tasks of parenting. The temple represents the presence of a much wider array of persons, a community, and resources to undergird them. That was important in the life of Jesus, and it is important for all of us in our continuing care of children.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Shelley D. B. Copeland

Perhaps this text is pleading with those of us in this generation to create a more just society for the children who come into the world through parents of limited means. We have questions with which to grapple. If Jesus were born today, to teen parents in American urban poverty, would he be better off now than he was 2,000 years ago? Will we answer the call to create a global community that makes sure all mothers and fathers have adequate health care, food, education, clothing, and shelter? When we consider the abundance of our nation, do faithful people of means have an obligation to the poor beyond offering them verbal blessings?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:22–40

Focus on Your Teaching

Christmas may be over, but the children will still be excited. School break and other changes, such as visitors staying with them and relaxed schedules at home, may give children extra energy. At the same time, children who are frequently present may be absent because their families are away. Whether the children are familiar with infant baptism makes a difference in how you plan the session. How they are welcomed by people other than family members at church will also affect how they interact with this Bible story.

God of mercy, as I plan this session, keep me alert to the ways the children understand themselves to be included in our congregation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- poster board
- marker
- white cloth
- Advent wreath
- Bible
- offering basket
- matches
- Christ candle
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- Resource Sheet 1
- Color Pack 5, 6, 7

For Responding

- option 1: optional: bags or card stock, art supplies
- option 2: Resource Sheet 2 and items listed there, masking tape
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 3 and ingredients and items listed there, tape, scissors
- option 4: newsprint or board, marker, paper, pens

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, print the gathering ritual on poster board and underline the children's parts. Place a marker at Luke in the worship table Bible. For option 3 in Responding, check the ingredients for the snack mix on Resource Sheet 3 (A Mix to Share) so that no child is allergic to any of them. For option 4 in Responding, be prepared to tell the children to whom the letter will be given.

As the children arrive, invite them to arrange these items on the worship table: white cloth, Advent wreath, Christ candle (large white candle with a cross painted or etched on it, set inside the Advent wreath), Bible, and offering basket. When it is time to begin, play "God, We Sing" (track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Explain that today is a Sunday during Christmastide or the Twelve Days of Christmas. Point out the white cloth and the Christ candle. Light all the candles on the Advent wreath and the Christ candle. Show the learners the ritual on poster board. Explain that they will say the underlined lines. Lead the ritual or invite a child to lead it.

Leader: On this Sunday of Christmastide,

Everyone: we remember the birth of Jesus.

Leader: And we pray:

Everyone: God, we gather today to celebrate the birth of your Son.

Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candles.

Invite the children to tell you how they celebrated Christmas Day. Beyond receiving gifts, encourage them to tell about having special guests, being guests, and attending any Christmas activities or events.

EXPLORING

Ask a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Read or invite a volunteer to read the name of the book. Show Color Pack 5 and recall that the story before Christmas was from the Gospel of Luke. Ask:

✠ What do you remember about that story?

When the learners have talked about the story of Gabriel and Mary, show Color Pack 6 and ask:

✠ What is the story the church tells about Christmas?

After the children have told the story of Jesus' birth, tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Two Who Recognized Jesus). Show Color Pack 7, and ask:

✠ Who are the people in this picture?

✠ What do you think each one is saying?

✠ How do you think each person is feeling?

✠ Who tells good news in this story?

The Waiting Song

*I have waited very long, very
long, very long.*

*I have waited very long to
see the baby Jesus.*

*I have waited very long, very
long, very long.*

*Jesus is God's promised
Son, he is God's promised
savior.*

*They had waited very long,
very long, very long . . .*

Sing "The Waiting Song" to the tune of "London Bridge." Have the children hum or sing "London Bridge" first so they remember the melody. Read the words to the first stanza. Ask:

✠ Who could "I" be in this song?

If there are enough children, the girls can sing the first stanza as Anna; then the boys, as Simeon. End with everyone singing the second stanza.

Conclude Exploring by noting that Simeon and Anna welcomed Jesus to the temple. Ask:

✠ How do we welcome people to our church?

RESPONDING

If possible, provide two options so children have a choice. Select one that is more challenging for children who are able to work on their own.

1. Welcome Simeon and Anna welcomed Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to the temple. The children will consider how they can welcome people to their church. If your congregation has greeters at the doors before worship, talk about what greeters do and rehearse the role of greeters. Have the children act out the parts of greeters and newcomers to the church. Ask:

✠ How would you make the new people feel welcome?

✠ What would make you feel welcome at a new church?

If possible, arrange for a time for the group to be greeters.

If your congregation gives visitors a welcome bag filled with information about the congregation and its ministries, ask if the children can decorate the bags or make cards to add to the bags. Provide supplies for them to prepare the bags or the cards.

2. Candleholders The children will make candleholders for votive candles to take home as a reminder of Jesus and that they are included in the church. Provide the supplies listed on Resource Sheet 2 (Light Your Candle). Follow the steps there to make the candleholders. As the children work, talk with them about the welcome Jesus received at the temple and how they are welcomed at the church. Make note of what they say. If some things don't feel welcoming to them, ask what could be changed to make the church more welcoming. Place a small piece of masking tape on the bottom of each candleholder on which to write the child's name. Set the completed candleholders on the worship table. Light them briefly so the children can see the effect of light through the tissue paper.

3. Thank-You Gifts Children usually recognize adults who are welcoming at the church. Ask the children who they know at church, other than their family members. Ask:
 ✨ How do these people make you feel welcome here?

When they have identified who and what makes them feel welcome, suggest that they make a gift for some of those people. Make the treat on Resource Sheet 3 (A Mix to Share). Cut out the gift tags. Have the children add the names of the recipients and their names and tape the tags to the bags of mix. When everyone has finished, conclude this activity with steps 5 and 6 on the resource sheet.

**EASY
 PREP**

Conduct this conversation with sensitivity, being open to the learners' feelings and encouraging constructive contributions.

4. Letter to the Congregation The children can express their thanks and, maybe, their suggestions for making them feel more welcome. Ask the children to think about how they know they are welcome at the church. Write their answers on newsprint or a board. Then ask if there are things that don't make them feel welcome. Write them in another list. Have the children look at the second list and suggest ways to change them. Finally, help them write a letter telling the congregation what makes them feel welcome and what would make the church a more welcoming place.

CLOSING

As the children gather at the worship table, play "God, We Sing" (track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Light the Christ candle.

Sing the fifth stanza of "God, We Sing."

Pray:

*Welcoming God, we praise you and give thanks to you for Christ Jesus.
 Teach us to follow him. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

As each child leaves, say: "(Name), go with joy in God. Be glad that Jesus Christ was born."

God, We Sing

5. God, we sing with praise
 to you,
 Light the flame of Christ
 anew;
 Light this candle, light the
 way,
 We celebrate new life today.
 Christ, be near us as we
 pray,
 And celebrate new life
 today.

Two Who Recognized Jesus

based on Luke 2:22-40

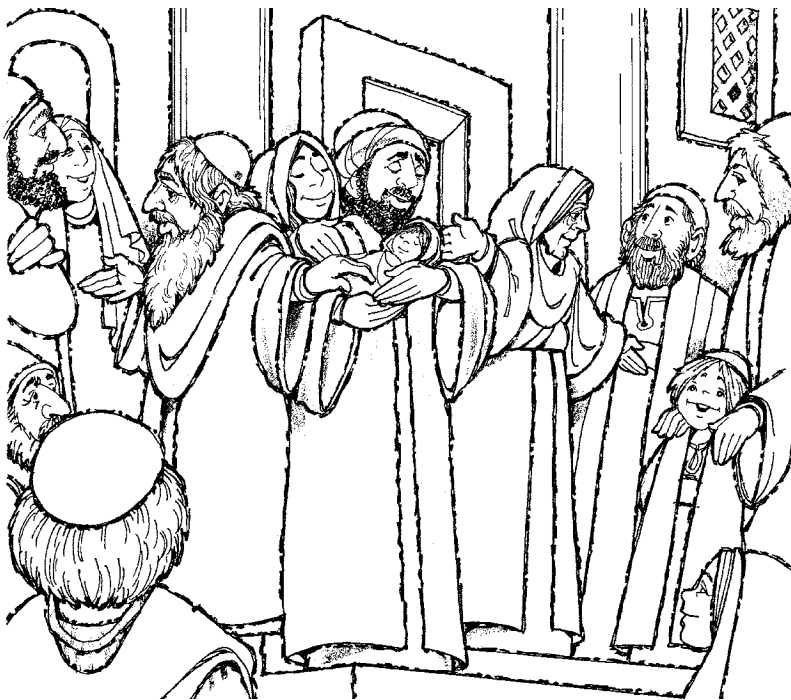
The Jews had a law that a few days after a mother had a baby boy, she went to the temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice to God. Mary had the baby Jesus, and now it was time to go to the temple.

At this time, a man named Simeon spent his days in the temple. He was very old, but God had promised Simeon that he would not die until after he had seen God's Messiah, the one who would save the people of Israel. On that day, the Holy Spirit put it into Simeon's head that he should go to the temple.

So Simeon was waiting in the temple when Mary, Joseph, and Jesus came into it. Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms, knowing immediately that this little baby was the one from God. Simeon praised God and said, "Now I can die in peace. I have seen the one God sent to save us."

Mary and Joseph stood and watched and listened, amazed at what was going on.

Also in the temple was the prophet Anna, who was eighty-four years old. She had lived in the temple day and night for many years, ever since her husband died. So Anna was always in the temple. She spent her days praying to God.



When Anna saw the baby Jesus, she too recognized that this boy was sent from God. She praised God and told everyone in the temple about Jesus.

After Mary made her sacrifices, the family traveled back to Nazareth. There Jesus grew strong and full of wisdom.

Light Your Candle

Light Your Candle

Christians use candles as a visual reminder that Jesus, the light of the world, promises to be present when Christians gather.

Some Christians celebrate the presentation of Jesus in the temple on a day called Candlemas Sunday. Worshipers receive candles to use at home as a reminder to look for the light of God's saving love, the light that Simeon and Anna saw shining in the infant Jesus.

Make a candle for your family to use at home. Tell your family about the Candlemas tradition. Light your candle when you pray as a reminder of the light of God's love that shines in Jesus and in each of you.

YOU WILL NEED

newspapers
1 empty, clean 4-ounce glass jar without lid (such as a baby food jar)
1 votive candle
colored tissue paper
scissors
white glue
water
small dish
paintbrush

Directions:

1. Cover your work area with old newspapers.
2. In a small dish, use your paintbrush to mix white glue with a few drops of water to thin it a little bit.
3. Cut tissue paper into small pieces of varying shapes.

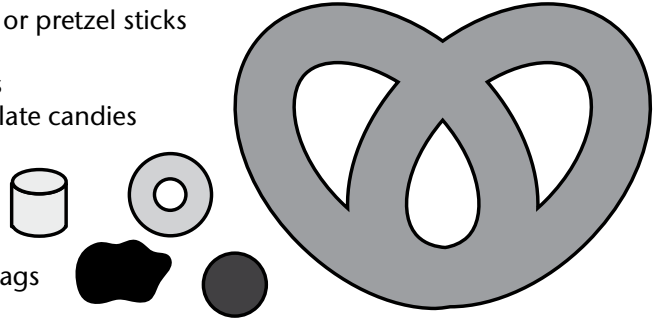


4. Paint a thin layer of glue on the outside of the jar, but not the bottom.
5. Apply the tissue-paper pieces to the glue. Completely cover the jar.
6. Paint another thin layer of glue over the tissue-paper pieces. Keep the layer as thin as possible; excess glue will cause the tissue to fold and overlap.
7. Let the glue dry completely.
8. After the jar is dry, put the votive candle inside and light it.

A Mix to Share

YOU WILL NEED

- 4 cups small pretzel twists or pretzel sticks
- 4 cups O-shaped cereal
- 2 cups mini marshmallows
- 1 cup candy-coated chocolate candies
- 1 cup raisins
- measuring cups
- large mixing bowl
- large mixing spoon
- zip-seal plastic sandwich bags
- napkins



Directions:

Have children wash hands and then help with the following steps:

1. Measure the ingredients into a large mixing bowl and mix it gently with a spoon.
2. For each child, set aside a small amount of mix on a napkin to eat later.
3. For each gift being made, fill a sandwich bag about half full and seal the top.
4. For each gift bag, make a gift tag from a copy of this resource sheet and tape it to the bag.
5. Say a prayer of thanks for each person who will receive a gift bag.
6. Say a prayer of thanks for food and, being mindful of allergies, eat the mix set aside on the napkins.

