

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Summary of Presentations

“Help Me Fall in Love with God”

The philosophy of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program is that even very young children have a religious life. God is present to them in their deepest being and they are capable of developing both a conscious and intimate relationship with God. We provide materials based on age-appropriate Scripture passages and liturgical signs that nurture their relationship with God. The program balances exposure to our liturgy and the richness of our communal sacramental life with reading the Bible. Our program begins with presenting the New Testament to the children because it is the foundation of our faith. The youngest learn about Jesus and the beauty and wonder of the Kingdom of God through carefully chosen Bible verses that foster a deep love for Jesus. As they grow older they are encouraged to think about their personal responsibility to maintain this relationship with God and their social responsibility in the world. The oldest group studies the Old Testament in great detail and continues to deepen their understanding of the liturgy. They plan worship services and begin community service.

Each presentation has specific materials designed to draw the child into the Biblical and Liturgical themes. These materials are always available to the children during their work time so they have additional opportunity to absorb the lessons.

The following is a summary to the presentations offered for Level I. Classes are structured to offer a time of prayer and song, a time for the “presentation” and a time for individual work by the child. The work of the children is their prayer and is the most important part of their time in the atrium.

Level I (Children ages three through six)

The theme for this level is the ***Good Shepherd who loves his sheep and gives everything for them.*** The child is introduced to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and discovers who the sheep are. The enjoyment of the gift of God’s own self to the child is the foundation of further religious insight and moral development. This Level could be characterized as a “time of joy and wonder” in the lives of the children.

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Presentations offered over this three year period can be divided into several large groupings. Below are listed the names of the presentations and their purpose.

Prayer

The Prayer Table - each atrium has a prayer table that is the central “gathering place”. Its purpose is to offer a place to support the prayer of the child. Prayer table cloths reflect the colors of the church year. Children are encouraged to set the prayer table.

Prayer Cards – children are encouraged to select prayer cards for display on the prayer table which reflect their thoughts.

23rd Psalm – this psalm is read and explored; the psalm is a form of prayer and talks about God’s protective and restoring love for us. The Good Shepherd (an image the children are familiar with) will take care of our needs.

Song and Art – all presentations are supported by art and music.

Practical Life Exercises – are activities done to establish, maintain and restore order to the environment and to oneself. One catechist describes the benefits of these exercises as follows: “the Holy lives in our lives and we can experience God in our most simple acts when we open our hearts and minds to Him. God is present in our ordinary lives and His spirit can permeate our daily practical work.”

Bible

Scripture Booklets – most presentations are accompanied by scripture booklets that contain the scripture passages on which the presentation is based. Often we will read these passages directly from the Bible.

Land of Israel – a globe, a puzzle map and a large topographical map are introduced to encourage the children to realize that Jesus was a real person who lived in a real place –Israel. The cities of Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem are introduced as well as the regions and waters in Israel.

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Infancy Narratives: All of the Infancy Narrative lessons are presented with figures, readings from the Bible and time to wonder at the events.

Annunciation (Luke 1:26 – 38)

Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39 – 49, 56)

Nativity and the Adoration of the Shepherds (Luke 2:1 – 20)

Adoration of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)

Presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:21 - 33, 36 – 39)

Paschal Narratives:

Jerusalem – a large topographical model of the walled city of Jerusalem is used to tell the events of the last days of Jesus’ life. Jerusalem is a real place where Jesus visited, celebrated the Last Supper, was arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, died, was entombed and resurrected.

Last Supper (Mark 14:12–17, 22-26; Luke 22:7–13, 17–20) – figures of Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper are used and the lesson is read from the Bible. This meal was the first time the words, “This is my body, this is my blood” were said by Jesus. In this lesson we announce that Jesus gives himself to us in the bread and the wine.

Women at the Tomb (Mark 16:1-8) – a model of the empty tomb, with only the figure of an angel in it, and the figures of three women, are used, along with the Biblical text from Mark to announce the physical resurrection of Jesus in a historical setting. The angel instructs the women to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.

Pentecost – in this celebration we announce the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the disciples and to announce that these gifts are given to all. When the hour came, he took his place at the table with the apostles. Luke 22:14

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Parables:

The Good Shepherd - (John 10:3b-5, 10b-11 and 14-16) this parable is read and a sheepfold, sheep and the figure of the Good Shepherd are used to announce the steadfast love of God. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are his beloved sheep.

The Found Sheep – (Luke 15:4-6) this parable is read and the materials from the Good Shepherd presentation are used to reinforce the image of how very precious we are to God as unique individuals and to explore concretely the love, care and trustworthiness of God.

The Mystery of Life and Death – (John 12:24) this parable is read and wheat plants at various stages of growth are used, to announce that death is the natural passage to risen life and that risen life is richer and fuller than life now.

Kingdom Parables:

Mustard Seed – (Mark 4: 30-32) this parable is read and a tiny mustard seed is given to each child to encourage the child to wonder at the power and strength of the Kingdom of God.

Pearl of Great Price – (Matthew 13:45-46) this parable is read and a model of a home, figures and pearls are used to encourage the child to wonder how the Kingdom of God is like a precious, beautiful pearl which is worth searching and sacrificing everything for.

Leaven – (Matthew 13:33) this parable is read and yeast, flour and water are used to illustrate the wonder at the mystery and power of the Kingdom of God, the additional message of patience is also present in this lesson.

The Growing Seed – (Mark 4:26-29) this parable is read and wondered about to encourage the child to understand that the Kingdom of God is eternally growing and expanding through faith and beyond our own understanding.

Hidden Treasure – (Matthew 13:44) this parable is read and wondered about to encourage the child to think about the mystery of God’s grace and unsurpassed worth/value of the Kingdom of God.

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Messianic Prophecies:

Prophecies are presented to the children to increase their understanding of Jesus and to increase their understanding of the plan God has for us.

Prophecy of Names – (Isaiah 9:6) this prophecy introduces some of the many names for Jesus – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Prophecy of Light – (Isaiah 9:2) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus is the light of the world.

Prophecy of Mary, the Mother of Christ – (Isaiah 7:14) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus was born to a young woman and is God incarnate.

Prophecy of Bethlehem – (Micah 5:1) – this prophecy proclaims the birthplace of Jesus as Bethlehem.

Prophecy of the Star and Scepter – (Numbers 24:17) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus is a historical figure from the lineage of Jacob who will be an eternal light and ruler of the world.

Liturgy

Eucharist:

Altar and Articles of the Eucharist – through the use of models the children learn the names and uses for the: altar table, altar cloth, paten, chalice, cross, candles, lectern (ambo), lectionary, Roman Missal, sanctuary lamp, corporal, purificator, pall, lavabo bowl, lavabo towel, cruets, ciborium, credence table and sacristy cabinet.

Liturgical Colors and Vestments of the Priest – these lessons introduces the colors of the church year and the vestments – the chasuble, the alb, the stole, and the cincture.

Liturgical Calendar – through a puzzle of the liturgical calendar, the children learn that God’s time is different from our time and the church year revolves around the important events of Redemption. There is no beginning and no end to the church year. The children also learn the great feasts of the year – Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

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Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd – this lesson uses the materials from the Good Shepherd lesson and a new sheepfold (the church) to show how the love of the Good Shepherd can be found in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is present in the bread and the wine and that is God’s gift to us.

Gestures of the Eucharist: – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Preparation of the Chalice as a visual sign of our union (water) with Jesus (wine).

Epiclesis – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Epiclesis as a visual sign of our asking for God’s gift of the Holy Spirit.

Offering – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Offering as a visual sign of our response to God’s gift to us.

Peace – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Peace as a visual and tactile sign of unity and sharing within the Body of Christ.

Baptism:

Light and White Garment – candles and a white garment are used to announce that Jesus is the light of the world and that through Baptism we become part of the light.

Water and Word – water, the Bible and chrism are used to announce that we are given the gifts of new life, joy, the strength of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God at our baptism.

Gestures – the gestures are visual signs with great meaning. The gesture over the water asks God to send the Holy Spirit into the water so that it might have the power to give us new life. The sign of the cross on the forehead marks us as Christ’s own forever. The cross over the congregation is a sign of Christ’s help and protection over all of us.

“A little lamb is born and it is going to get the light of Jesus.”

Reflection of a 6 year old child;