



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Create a Liturgical Classroom Environment ADVENT/WINTER WISDOM

Wisdom advice once offered to me was: “Learn something from everything—even if it is what not to be!” We can learn much from Mary, the handmaid of the Lord. But Herod, first persecutor of Jesus, also has much to teach us!

Rich with prophecies and promises, dreamers and searchers, the Winter Gospels can offer catechists a curriculum for character formation. By reflecting on the traits of a scripture personality and observing attitudes, behaviors and consequences of choices (Gospel ABCs), people of all ages can set goals for personal growth. Though the winter liturgical season is brief (First Sunday of Advent to the celebration of Jesus’ Baptism), the scriptural figures, scenarios and advice of Advent and Christmastime offer abundant opportunity to grow in Christian character.

The Liturgical Year always begins with the First Sunday of Advent. Cycle A features the Gospel of Matthew. Mark reveals who Jesus is through Cycle B readings. During Cycle C the Gospel of Luke tutors our hearts. Luke reveals a Jesus who “went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” (Acts 10:38) More than the other three Gospels, Luke emphasizes the mercy and compassion of Jesus, the role of the Spirit in the life of Jesus, the importance of prayer, and respectful concern for women. These themes will emerge through the Sunday Gospels of Cycle C, mostly during Ordinary Time.

This newsletter emphasizes the Scriptural themes of Advent and Christmas. Therefore the ideas apply to Cycles A, B and C. The winter readings focus on prophecies fulfilled, the Infancy Narratives, Epiphany events, and the Holy Family. Christmastime concludes with the Baptism of Jesus. I urge Catechists to help students of all ages to combine the lessons of the season’s Sunday Gospels into a **PROFILE OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER**. Lead the children to identify and practice the positive traits that emerge from the stories and to cite contemporary examples of those virtues.

- On a dedicated bulletin board, a mobile tri-fold presentation board, or a portable easel draw an Advent wreath or create three-dimensional paper candles. Encircle the wreath with paper holly leaves or evergreen boughs. When a character trait emerges in the Readings of the Sunday liturgy, discuss its application to student life and write the word on a wreath leaf.

- Place an empty Christmas crib on the classroom prayer table. Keep paper-pieces of hay available. As character-qualities surface write them on straw pieces and begin to fill the crib. Either “build” the crib as students practice a particular trait and give witness to it or fill the crib and then from it “draw out” a practice for the student to apply on that day or during the week.

- Draw the advent wreath or crib on 8.5x11" paper and duplicate for each student – or have students draw their own. For each Gospel trait practiced, the student can label a leaf from the wreath or straw and/or color it. Let it build throughout the season.

- Create a "spiritual crib." List the items, facilities, etc., that would be needed for a newborn baby today. Estimate the cost of such things. Then assign a "spiritual price tag" to each item, i.e., participation in a weekday Mass = hospital costs; performing a random act of

kindness = one clothing outfit; a decade of the rosary = 10 feedings. Use Advent days to perform this "spiritual shopping."

- Provide Christmas tree ornament balls. Write one trait with its scripture citation per tree ball and decorate the classroom tree. Discuss the trait or give witness to its practice before hanging it on the tree.

- Place a mini-easel on the classroom prayer table. Use it to "feature" the week's character traits.

Look beyond words. Name **traits that shape Christian character**. For instance, "The days are surely coming when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer. 33:14). A possible conclusion? *Keep my promises*.

Look at personality traits to emulate. For instance,

Gabriel: Be a messenger of God's will.

Mary: Be non-defensive and thoughtful of others.

Elizabeth: Become better rather than bitter through disappointment.

Zachary: Learn that nothing is impossible for God.

Joseph: Act with justice and charity.

What character traits do you extract from these same figures and stories? There is no one expected answer. *Inn-keeper, proclamation angels, stable animals, census donkey, manger, shepherds, wisemen, Herod, advisors, Holy Innocents, Simeon, Anna, Egypt, the Holy Family on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and John the Baptist...* all have lessons to teach us. Possibilities abound to profile Christian character.

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