

Lesson Plans for Younger and Older Children

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Background: Easter - the unearned gift of grace. The reflective season of “going in” that Lent provided (no matter what disciplines we undertook, nor even how well we attended to them) explodes on Easter. Of course, we cannot “figure it out.” How comforting, then, to have these Scriptures, showing first how the disciples struggled to grasp what had happened and then stories of Jesus before the crucifixion, which are written in the light of the Resurrection.

As Easter people we know, as Paul said, that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God. We are people who expect life out of death. And so, in Eastertide we celebrate the wonder and prepare ourselves to take the awesome message out into the world on Pentecost.

A Notation for this Week's Gospel

This is John's account of the resurrection, where Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb by herself and finds that the stone in front of the tomb had been moved. She runs to get Simon Peter and the beloved disciple who go inside the tomb to find the wrappings that were on Jesus' body were still there, but Jesus was gone. The disciples return to where they are staying and Mary is standing outside the tomb crying when she is asked by angels, “woman, why are you crying?” She explains, only to have Jesus (who she does not recognize) ask her the same question. Jesus answers her by simply saying her name, which causes her to recognize him. Jesus tells her to go spread the news that he has risen and will be ascending to the Father.

Theme: We Are Easter People

Note: Many churches do not hold regular classes on Easter. If, however, you meet with the children we suggest this modified plan. No session for adults is offered on the assumption that any time after the service would be spent identifying people who are not regular members and extending hospitality to them as well as time spent celebrating Easter.

Before: You will need a roll of paper, markers, easter eggs, etc. If you have decorated the room with purple for Lent, change the colors in the room to white.

Beginning: As each child enters your space, greet the child by asking what they had done differently that morning. (Easter baskets, eggs, candy) Then wonder with them why they did those things.

Opening Prayer: *Amazing God, we thank you for bringing us once again to this glorious day in which we remember that you rose from the dead and brought us all back to life. Help us to be your Easter people in the world. Amen.*

The Story: If you know that any of the children attended any of the Holy Week services, invite the children to tell you what they noticed in church this past week. Be sure the children understand that Jesus died on the cross and everyone thought he would stay dead.

Story Resources: There are two resources that you may want to use if you already have them: The Easter Story, "Jesus is Alive" from Children of God Storybook Bible by Archbishop Desmond Tutu OR "The Empty Tomb" from Spark Story Bible. Both are beautifully told for children.

Our story today happened on a Sunday very early in the morning. The Sunday after Jesus died. The men and women who had been Jesus' friends were very sad. Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' friends and followers, wanted to go visit his tomb. A tomb was a kind of a cave with a huge rock in front of it. When Mary reached the tomb, the huge stone was moved to one side. Mary ran to get Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, and as they returned with Mary Magdalene, the disciples find that Jesus' body was not in the

tomb! The cloth that had covered his body was neatly folded and lying in the tomb.

The disciples could not explain what had happened and returned to where they were staying. Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb, standing outside crying. When she saw two angels, they asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him."

Mary turned and saw another man standing there. This other man was Jesus, but she did not recognize him. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Mary Magdalene thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him so I can go get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." Upon hearing Jesus speak her name, Mary realized who it was and cried out to him, "Rabboni!" (Which means teacher).

Jesus told her that she needed to go to the disciples and tell them that he had risen and that Jesus will ascend to go be with God. Mary ran and told the disciples, "I have seen my Lord," and told them all the things she had witnessed.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder why Mary was going to the tomb to visit Jesus?
- I wonder what Mary and the disciples felt when they saw the empty tomb?
- I wonder what it was like for Mary to hear Jesus say her name?
- I wonder what your favorite part of this story was?

Activity: Tell the children that Easter is not just today. Easter Day is today and Easter Season and celebration lasts for 7 more weeks. We want to help remind everyone, including ourselves, that we are Easter people all the time, not just today.

Today we celebrate Jesus being raised from the dead. Today's story is one of miracles and joy.

What are some ways that we can show joy? (Allow the children to respond)

When Jesus called Mary's name, she responded with such joy and excitement because she realized that Jesus was right in front of her. I wonder, what are some ways that we know Jesus is with us? (Allow the children to respond)

Group Response: Invite the children to create an Eastertide banner with you. Take a sheet off of a large roll of paper (like butcher paper or poster paper you buy on a roll) and write "Alleluia" in very large letters in the middle. Underneath, write "Christ is Risen and calls us by Name." You could also print out the message on sheets of colorful paper and tape them to the banner. Then have the children join you in decorating this and writing their name on the banner as well as anything they want to remember from the Easter story. Have this banner hang in your room or somewhere the children will see it throughout the season of Easter.

Alleluias: If you "put away" the alleluias, today would be the day to open the box and let them out. You can take the alleluias and decorate your classroom or (if you have permission) decorate the coffee hour space.

Egg Hunt: Get enough empty Easter eggs for your class (realize that there may be more children there that day if they are there visiting family). Before class fill the eggs with stickers or pieces of paper that say things like Alleluia or Christ is Risen or Happy Easter. You can find lots of inexpensive Easter stickers at places like www.orientaltrading.com. You can also put some candy or goldfish or other treats inside, but make sure they have at least one message about Easter in or on each egg.

Before the Easter Egg Hunt invite the children to wonder about what the Easter Egg means. I wonder why we give eggs on Easter? I wonder what that might have to do with Jesus?

- The egg is widely used as a symbol of the start of new life, just as new life emerges from an egg when the chick hatches out.
- The egg is seen by Christians as a symbol of the resurrection because while being dormant it contains a new life sealed within it

Once you wonder with the children, invite them to look for Easter Eggs in the space that you define for them. Make sure to give them boundaries and guidelines to keep them safe and in the designated space.

After they have found all the eggs, invite them to come back together and share what they found inside.

Getting Closure: As you close your time together, gather the children together and ask them what they remember most about the Easter story. What did they learn?

Closing Prayer: *Gracious and life giving God, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who knows us by name, and calls us to join him in the resurrection feast this Easter time. Be with us as we go into the world that we may find you in the signs of spring, in our name being called, and in the things that we do. Amen.*

Written by the Rev. Shannon Kelly

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward

the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.