Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Younger Children
Advent 1 (B)
New Testament: Mark 13:24-37

BACKGROUND
Advent means “coming.” The coming of the baby Jesus, God among us in human flesh. The coming of Christ again "the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. In between those two great comings is God’s constant longing for each of us to come to God, to love God, and to let God love us. "Be alert." Notice. Listen. Watch. For what? For the ways God will choose to get our attention this season. For those moments when we notice that our ways are not in alignment with God’s ways. For those shimmering glimpses of the Kingdom of God.

A NOTATION FOR THIS WEEK’S READING
Ominous warnings of end times: These warnings and words of hope heard in a community that was pretty sure the world was coming to an end. The message: Keep alert! Stay awake! Pay attention! Jesus just might come this very night. Implicit is the invitation to make some changes in our priorities and to notice what really matters.

THEME
Keep Alert!

BEFORE CLASS
Using 3 x 5 cards and bright felt markers, make a card for each child with the words "Keep Alert!" in large letters. You will need a Bible, purple or blue cloth for the altar, four votive candles in little glass containers, long fireplace matches OR electric votive candles, and greens to make a wreath. (Longer matches are much safer if you are going to let small children light candles.) Use this Advent wreath in the class the four Sundays of Advent. You can also bring a nativity set if you wish to have that out on the altar.

BEGINNING
Greet each child. Ask the children what they notice about our space. (different colors, wreath, etc.) Ask them what season is coming in the church? (Allow them time to respond.) How do we get ready for Christ coming? What things do you do at your house? You might offer something like this: "At my house we have a nativity set of the Baby Jesus, his mother, Mary, his daddy, Joseph, some animals and shepherds and we put these little dolls on a table where we can all see them. Do you do something like this at your house?

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OPENING PRAYER

Form a circle around the altar with the Advent wreath in the middle and light one candle only. Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Next Sunday we will light two candles. Let us pray: Dear God, thank you for letting us be here together today. Thank you for (name each child). Help us to "Stay Alert" and prepare for the coming of Christ this Advent season. Amen.

THE STORY: MARK 13:24-32, 33-37

With this age group read only verses 33-37. "Does anyone know what it means when I say 'Keep Alert?' (Allow them time to respond) What if I say: 'Watch!' 'Listen.' (Allow them time to respond.) So what would we say it means to 'Keep Alert?' Work with the children to come up with what you and they believe it means. It could be "Pay attention," or "Don't zone out." Ask the children to listen as you read the story. You can read the story from a Bible or tell the story like we have done below.

Jesus told us that he is coming back, but nobody knows when that is going to happen. Jesus wants us to be watching and doing the stuff we need to do. If we were going on a trip and had a puppy, we would want to be sure we had someone we could trust who would take care of that puppy until we got back. We would want someone who would remember to feed the puppy and take him for walks. We would want someone who would pay attention. Watch. Stay alert.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are there things at home or school that you take care of?
- What are the things that help them grow, things that make a happy home?
- Jesus wants us to grow and be joyful as we wait for the coming of Christ. I wonder what things we could do for each other that would make us joyful?
- I wonder how we prepare for Christmas?

ACTIVITY

Give the children pieces of paper and crayons and ask them to draw what their house is going to look like as they get ready for Christmas. Will they have a Christmas tree? Will they have a nativity set? What will they do to help get their houses ready?

GETTING CLOSURE

Give each child one of the 3 x 5 cards with the words "Keep Alert!" that you prepared before the session. Suggest they take it home and put it on the refrigerator. When members of the family ask them what it means, the child can tell them. The children may also take their pictures home with them.

CLOSING PRAYER

Sing one verse of "Silent Night," then close with prayer: "Thank you, God, for this time we have had together. Help us to keep alert and prepare for your coming. Amen."

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