

# Human Degradation and Spirituality for a New Humanity

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## Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present to you this liturgical year's series of Sunday School, starting with the Advent and Christmas Season.

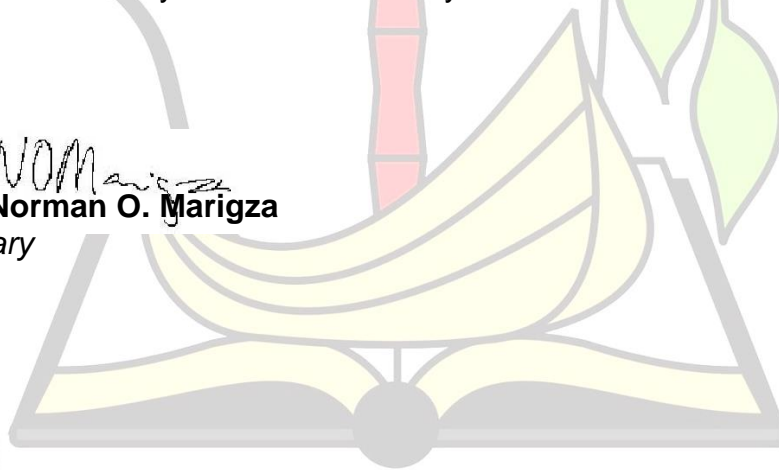
We are grateful to the pool of writers who have worked doubly hard to come up with the lessons, knowing of our hope and desire that these materials can be uploaded early enough so that they can be translated into the three major Philippine languages: **Iloco**, the language spoken most widely in the North; **Bisaya** (Cebuano) which is most widely spoken in the Visayas and Mindanao, and **Tagalog**, which is most widely spoken in the Central and South Luzon areas. Thus, we are also grateful to our Translator Teams who bring the lessons to the language most understood by the people on the pews. We also thank Ms. Melinda Grace Aoanan, who shepherded the entire process.

We learn that one of the factors why the early Church was dynamic was that members devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). They were grounded on the Word and established in the faith (Col. 2:7). But we should also know the condition of our communities, our society and our world upon which the Good News is to be shared. One theologian (attributed to Karl Barth) puts it this way: have the Bible on one hand and the newspaper on the other. Or as one former General Secretary (Bishop Mercurio Serenia) loved to say, "faithful to the text and sensitive to the context." In this way, our study of God's Word becomes relevant in our time.

We commend these Sunday School lessons to you.

In Christ,

  
**Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza**  
General Secretary



*Introduction*

Why do we need to highlight human degradation as a sub-theme for this quadrennium? Why do we need to study it in Sunday School? How degraded is humanity? Why do we need a 'new humanity'? What is wrong with the present humanity? Genesis 1: 27 says: So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God they were created; male and female God created them [NRSV, paraphrased].

We have a new president who is relatively radical. The last SONA might as well have been the first SONA where people gathered to show support for the presidency instead of being a protest rally. People say he has accomplished much more in his first one hundred days than his predecessor has done in all his six-year term.

We are in this crux of our history where many things can happen. The hastening of change favorable to the majority of the Filipino people can happen. This of course is not dependent on a president. This can only depend on you and I and the millions of masses clamoring for change. The one who sits at the helm of government can only be a secondary force in this fight for change. So let us work for change. Let us teach and preach and work for the hastening of the Kingdom of God.

What needs changing? Let us take a look around us.

**And God created humankind in God's image....**

How are our farmers?

Perhaps we can still remember the massacre of farmers that happened in Kidapawan on April 1 last year. If they are created in the image of God, is it okay that bullets are rained on them while protesting because they and their families are hungry? Is it okay that they go hungry to the point where they need to protest? They who toil long hours just so we can have food on our table do not have food on theirs. Why are our farmers going hungry?

Our country's natural resources can support the whole Philippine population many times over and through several hundreds of years, and yet we remain to be a third-world country. We have so many fish in our seas and rivers but the catch of our local fisherfolk have been dwindling year after year. Why is that? Japanese companies have been trawling our waters for years now, leaving next to nothing for our fisherfolk with their simple nets and fishing gear. Our farmers do not have enough land to till because land-grabbing continues. The call of the farmers still is land to the tillers; ninety percent of them are landless. Farmers and fisherfolk are the top two sectors with the highest poverty incidence. No matter how hard they work, they remain the poorest in the country due to landlessness and lack of government support. They are victims of human rights violations. The socio-economic system prevailing in the countryside perpetuate this deprived state of the rural sector, keeping the national economy from reaching its full potential. Is this the image of God? Farmers can only realize full

agricultural productivity if genuine agrarian reform coupled with national industrialization will take place.

How about the workers?

Workers still continue to call for a significant wage increase in the form of a 125-peso across-the-board nationwide hike. They have been clamoring for this for at least a decade now. They also continue to call for good quality jobs. Seven in every 10 so-called employed are in jobs that are precarious, and low-paying. Is this the image of God?

How about our IP sisters and brothers?

Lumád and other IP communities strongly resisting encroachment of extractive and agribusiness companies into their ancestral lands are targeted by military and paramilitary groups. The military will continue to harass and threaten the IPs. IP communities protect many ancestral lands, one of the few remaining biodiversity areas with old growth forest that house rare species of flora and fauna. These areas are the best spots to extract gold, nickel, and copper. Ninety-seven percent of mineral production is brought out of the country. Despite the billions amassed from the mining industry in the Philippines, Lumád and other IP communities are not benefited, even with basic social services such as education and health. Is this the image of God? The present set-up of the mining industry only benefits imperialist countries at the expense of indigenous peoples and the environment. The Lumad stand firm in their position not to allow mining and logging companies to operate within their ancestral land. Organized IPs from the Cordilleras to Mindanao demand to nationally industrialize the mining industry as a step forward in developing other important national industries that truly serve the Filipino people. They assert their right to their ancestral domain and their right to self-determination.

Not only indigenous peoples are affected by mining and logging activities. These irresponsible extractive businesses ravage the environment, affecting all of us. Is this the image of God?

We see such a grim picture of our present national situation. What are we to do? As a church, what is our role in all these?

### **The Challenge**

*"The Spirit of God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*[Luke 4: 18, 19, NRSV]*

***The Spirit of God is upon me....***

What does it mean when we have the Spirit of God upon us? What is it in God's Spirit that pushes us to do what we need to do? What moves, what drives the Spirit of God is the Will of God. The Will of God for the people of God is life in all its fullness: freedom, equitable sharing, dignity, genuine love for one another; the absence of oppression and exploitation. When we say that the Spirit of God is upon us, it means that our will is aligned to the will of God. It means that life in all its fullness for everyone and not just for some is also our aim.

***God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor***

What is good news to the poor? A life free from the fetters of poverty, hunger, depravation; land for the tiller, dignity of labor, food; being able to provide for one's family—that is good news to the poor. We must educate our constituents, conscientize the masses that this situation, their situation, runs counter to the will of God. They must wake up to the truth that their suffering is due to an unjust system where only a powerful few benefit from the world's riches.

***God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives***

This is truly good news to the political prisoners whose only "misdeed" is that they choose to serve their fellow human beings who need their help and advocacy the most.

***Recovery of sight to the blind***

For those who are physically blind, healing is truly good news and a welcome relief. For those who insist on being blind to the realities of our time, it is our responsibility to help them open their eyes to the truth of our present situation and mobilize them to participate in God's mission.

***To let the oppressed go free...***

As Christians, as followers of Christ, it is our responsibility to ensure that the Will of God will prevail over all the earth. But this does not mean that we are the answers to the problems, that the church has the solution to what ails society. Let us not be messianic, triumphalist and chauvinist.

***...To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.***


The time of the coming of God's salvation lies in God's hands; the answers lie in the hands of the oppressed masses who suffer the most in the present status quo. Those who live and suffer and are concretely in the midst of the struggle, in them lie the answers. In the midst of suffering, God is with them. In the midst of struggle, God is with them. God is always with them.

*God wants for God's people that they be the charters and crafters of their own destiny—the destiny of freedom, of equitable sharing of resources, of each one's full participation in the shaping of a just society.*

### **What is Our Role and Our Response?**

We must always be critical in discerning the signs of the times. Each one of us must be an instrument for change. We must be true followers of Christ and emulate his example of genuine love and compassion for his fellow human beings, denouncing those who oppress and take advantage of others. And through these Sunday School materials, we must educate and empower each other for these tasks. Let us not allow this present dispensation to continue: that there are a few who enjoy the bounty of the land while countless others are desolate and hungry. Let us not allow the greedy and powerful few to trample upon our rights and rob us of the riches God has bestowed upon us. Let us listen to the cries of the suffering and struggling poor. Let us be one with them in their struggle. Let us be in solidarity with them, journeying with them towards a life that is full and free.

With this prescriptive Spirituality can we confront and survive these critical times and journey together towards becoming a New Humanity. For sure that in this great mission that is itself God's mission, we journey with God, as God is always with us, Immanuel.

  
**Ms. Melinda Grace B. Aoanan**  
National Coordinator  
Christian Education and Nurture Program

*Calendar of Lessons*

**For Liturgical Year 2016-2017, the lessons are subdivided into these four scopes and strands:**

- Scope 1: **Rootedness**  
Strand 1: ***Jesus' Encounters with Human Degradation and its Transformations***
  - Advent and Christmastide (27 November 2016 – 1 January 2017)
  - Epiphany (8 January – 26 February 2017)
- Scope 2: **Identity: On Being and Becoming**  
Strand 2: ***Jesus' Choice of the Kind of Messiah***
  - Lent (5 March – 9 April 2017)
  - Eastertide (16 April – 28 May 2017)
- Scope 3: **Unity and Solidarity**  
Strand 3: ***The Church United to Respond to Human Degradation***
  - ***Pentecost (4 June – 20 August 2017)***
- Scope 4: **Fruitful Lifeworks**  
Strand 4: ***The Church Manifesting the Marks of a Christ-like Life***
  - Kingdomtide (27 August – 26 November 2017)

**Quadrennial Theme: Spirituality for These Critical Times**Year 3 Theme: **Human Degradation and Spirituality for a New Humanity 2016-2017**Scope 1: **Rootedness**Strand 1: ***Jesus' Encounters with Human Degradation and its Transformations***

Included Sundays for Advent and Christmastide Season (6 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(1) November 27, 2016	First Sunday of Advent	<b>Liberating Cultural Breakthroughs</b>	1 Samuel 25:13-34 Matthew 1:18-24	There are cultural practices and beliefs that cause human suffering and degradation, thus, the church should make a cultural breakthrough in the transformation towards a new humanity.
(2) December 4, 2016	Second Sunday of Advent/Family Sunday	<b>Seeds of New Humanity</b>	Isaiah. 7:14 Luke 1:26-35	Like the enslaved people in Egypt, the new humanity emerges from among the victims who long for freedom and wholeness.
(3) December 11, 2016	Third Sunday of Advent/Human Rights Sunday	<b>Challenging Oppressive State Powers</b>	1 Kings 12:1-16 Luke 2:1-6	The church has the duty to expose and challenge state policies that violate human rights.
(4) December 18, 2016	Fourth Sunday of Advent	<b>Jesus as God's Love Incarnate</b>	Isaiah 49:1-3 John 3:11-17	In the midst of a broken humanity, God came in Jesus

				to mend it and make it whole.
(5) December 25, 2016	First Sunday after Christmas	<b>The Birth of Jesus</b>	Psalms 91:11 Luke 2:7-18 John 1:14	We joyfully celebrate the birth of Jesus in a world that longs for fullness.
(6) January 1, 2017	First Sunday after Christmas	<b>Defending Children, Symbols of a New Beginning</b>	Isaiah 43:18-19 Matthew 2:1-16	Upholding the rights and welfare of children makes a just and compassionate society now and in the future.
<b>Included Sundays for Epiphany Season</b> (8 lessons)	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Lectionary Title</b>	<b>Scriptural References</b>	<b>General Concept</b>
(7) January 8, 2017	Epiphany Sunday	Channels of God's Healing	2 Kings 7:1-16 John 9:1-41	We are all healers to one another.
(8) January 15, 2017	First Sunday after Epiphany/Christian Unity	<b>The Inclusive Healing Ministry of the Church</b>	2 Kings 5:1-19 Mark 1:29-31	"The kingdom of God is present...where healing is given to the sick." (UCCP Statement of Faith)
(9) January 22, 2017	Second Sunday after Epiphany/National Bible Sunday	<b>Healing of Animosities</b>	Isaiah 11:1-9 Galatians 3:28	Respecting and appreciating differences is a condition for creative unity and harmony.
(10) January 29, 2017	Third Sunday after Epiphany	<b>Healing as a Message of Salvation</b>	2 Kings 4:8-37 Luke 8:41-56	Salvation comes whenever healing happens.
(11) February 5, 2017	Fourth Sunday after Epiphany	<b>Healing of Social Divides</b>	Ruth 1:1-21 Luke 13:10-17	Social division is eradicated when human fellowship, care, respect,

				and dignity are restored.
(12) February 12, 2017	Fifth Sunday after Epiphany	<b>Healing of Broken Relationships</b>	Genesis 32:1-32, 33:1-4 Matthew 5:24	Where there are broken relationships, it is the duty of the church to bring about reconciliation through forgiveness and repentance.
(13) February 19, 2017	Sixth Sunday after Epiphany	<b>Healing from Demon Possession</b>	1 Samuel 16:14-23 Mark 5:1-20	The Spirit of God drives away the demons of envy, fear, and greed for the Spirit to dwell in.
(14) February 26, 2017	Seventh Sunday after Epiphany/Transfiguration Sunday	<b>Healing towards Transformation</b>	Exodus 34:29-35 Mark 9:2-8	The transfiguration of Jesus is a preview of his resurrection which is our hope and destiny.

Scope 2: **Identity: On Being and Becoming**  
 Strand 2: ***Jesus' Choice of the Kind of Messiah***

Included Sundays for Lent (6 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(15) March 5, 2017	First Sunday in Lent	<b>Choosing our Destiny</b>	Jeremiah 1:4-10 Matthew 16:21-23	Jesus chose to obey God's will and it became his destiny. When we make a choice to follow Jesus, it becomes our destiny.

(16) March 12, 2017	Second Sunday in Lent	<b>Servant Messiah</b>	Isaiah 53:4-6 Mark 10:42-45	As a servant messiah, Jesus served the suffering ones. As a result, he suffered with them. When we serve the suffering ones, we also suffer with them.
(17) March 19, 2017	Third Sunday in Lent	<b>Loyalty to God</b>	Ruth 1:16-17 Luke 7:1-10	The love for God is the basis of our unwavering loyalty to God.
(18) March 26, 2017	Fourth Sunday in Lent	<b>Peace-building</b>	Jeremiah 1:9-10 Matthew 10:34	Building peace, as a messianic mission, requires forcible removal of obstacles to peace—inequitable distribution of resources, abusive relationships, and injustice.
(19) April 2, 2017	Fifth Sunday in Lent	<b>Marks of the True Messiah</b>	Isaiah 42:1-7 Matthew 11:2-6	The true messiah is known through his healing, liberating, and restoring deeds.
(20) April 9, 2017	Sixth Sunday in Lent/Palm Sunday	<b>Jesus Encountering the Powers</b>	Zechariah 9:9-10 John 12:12-19	Jesus enters Jerusalem to challenge the powers-that-be that cause human misery.

Included Sundays for Eastertide (7 lessons)	Celebration	Lectionary Title	Scriptural References	General Concept
(21) April 16, 2017	Resurrection Sunday	<b>Resurrection of the Righteous</b>	Daniel 12:1-3 John 11:25-27 Romans 6:5	Those who remain faithful to the end will not perish but have eternal life.
(22) April 23, 2017	First Sunday after Resurrection	<b>Suppressing the Truth of the Resurrection</b>	Jeremiah 28:15-17 Matthew 28:11-15	The response of the powers-that-be to the resurrection was to cover up the truth with a lie and criminalize those who believe.
(23) April 30, 2017	Second Sunday after Resurrection	<b>Moment of Human Frailties</b>	2 Samuel 21:10 Mark 16:1-8	After Jesus died, the disciples experienced a lacuna moment of mourning, confusion, fear, depression, and disbelief. This experience is not sin but needs to be accepted and brought to the Lord.
(24) May 7, 2017	Third Sunday after Resurrection	<b>Appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene</b>	2 Kings 7:7-20 Mark 16:9-11	The testimony of those who speak the truth are often discredited on account of their status in society.
(25) May 14, 2017	Fourth Sunday after Resurrection	<b>Failure to Recognize the Appearance of Jesus</b>	Genesis 18:1-15 Mark 16:12-13	Due to their extreme grief, the disciples were not able

				to apprehend the risen Lord. But Jesus overcomes our failure to discern and communes with us.
(26) May 21, 2017	Fifth Sunday after Resurrection/UC CP Sunday	<b>Celebrating the Resurrection</b>	Exodus 16:1-26 Luke 24:36-46	Jesus comes to commune with us in ordinary, basic, and common activities and struggles.
(27) May 28, 2017	Sixth Sunday after Resurrection/Ascension Sunday	<b>Anticipating the Fullness of God's Reign on Earth</b>	Daniel 12:13 Mark 16:15-20	Jesus ascends to heaven to receive God's authority to realize God's reign in its fullness.

Scope 3: **Unity and Solidarity**Strand 3: ***The Church United to Respond to Human Degradation***

<b>Included Sundays for Pentecost Season (12 lessons)</b>	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Lectionary Title</b>	<b>Scriptural References</b>	<b>General Concept</b>
(28) June 4, 2017	Pentecost Sunday	<b>The Spirit Breaking through Cultural Captivity</b>	Joel 2:28-29 Acts 2:1-12	The Spirit enables the Gospel to be communicated in the languages and cultures of the people.
(29) June 11, 2017	First Sunday after Pentecost/Trinity Sunday	<b>The Holy Trinity in the Faith of the Church</b>	Genesis 1:26-27 Jude vv. 19:21	God is a community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the source and basis of the

				church as community.
(30) June 18, 2017	Second Sunday after Pentecost	<b>The Holy Spirit Sustaining the Church</b>	Jeremiah 7:1-11 Matthew 23:13-28	The Holy Spirit bids the church to unite with the people to confront the oppressive powers.
(31) June 25, 2017	Third Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Defending the Powerless</b>	Psalms 82:3-4; 146:5-9 Proverbs 31:8-9 James 1:27	The Holy Spirit sustains the church in its ministry of protecting the oppressed and the helpless and upholding their rights.
(32) July 2, 2017	Fourth Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Breaking Down Walls that Divide</b>	Isaiah 56:3-8 Amos 9:7 Luke 14:12-14	The church, by nature, is inclusive. It embraces differences and does not harbor animosities.
(33) July 9, 2017	Fifth Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Confronting Human Greed</b>	Deuteronomy 5:21 Acts 2:44-47; 4:33-35	The church confronts the issue of human greed which is the root of many evils and broken relationships.
(34) July 16, 2017	Sixth Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Casting Out Demonic Powers</b>	Psalms 103:2-5 Mark 1:23-27; 7:24-30	The church's ministry of healing requires the driving out of demonic powers that hold people in their sway.
(35) July 23, 2017	Seventh Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Being Present</b>	Deuteronomy 31:8 Psalm 40:1-3 Revelation 21:3-4	The church embraces the ministry of presence to embody God who is Immanuel.

(36) July 30, 2017	Eighth Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Nurturing Hope</b>	Job 5:15-16 Psalm 34:17-20 Matthew 11:28-30	The church journeys with people in the darkness of despair, reviving the hope and keeping it alive.
(37) August 6, 2017	Ninth Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Reaching Out to Victims of Abuse and Social Evils</b>	Isaiah 25:4 Matthew 18:21-35	The church is a community that provides comfort, assistance, shelter, and intervention to victims in their needs.
(38) August 13, 2017	Tenth Sunday after Pentecost	<b>Pursuing and Building Peace</b>	Psalm 34:11-14 1Peter 3:8-12	The church plants peace in a world rocked by conflict, violence, and wars.
(39) August 20, 2017	Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost	<b>The Church Awakened to Do Mission</b>	Isaiah 59:17 Ephesians 6:14	An awakened church girds up and equips itself for mission.

Scope 4: **Fruitful Lifeworks**Strand 4: ***The Church Manifesting the Marks of a Christ-like Life***

<b>Included Sundays for Kingdomtide Season</b> (14 lessons)	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Lectionary Title</b>	<b>Scriptural References</b>	<b>General Concept</b>
(40) August 27, 2017	First Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Mission Sunday	<b>Leaving Everything to Follow Christ</b>	Isaiah 6:1-8 Luke 5:1-11	Obedience to Jesus means letting go of those cares that keep us from following him.
(41) September 3, 2017	Second Sunday in Kingdomtide/ CEN Sunday	<b>Mission to the Periphery</b>	1 Samuel 18:1-5 Philippians 2:5-8 2 Corinthians 8:9	Removing our self from the center of our life so that we can put others in its place.
(42) September 10, 2017	Third Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Children' Sunday	<b>Humility-Powered Mission</b>	Proverbs 15:33, 11:2 Luke 18:9-14	Behind genuine mission is a humble heart that seeks the well-being of others.
(43) September 17, 2017	Fourth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Youth Sunday	<b>Accountability in the Kingdom</b>	2 Samuel 12:1-13 Luke 15:11-24	Being created in the image of God, we are responsible and accountable to each other.
(44) September 24, 2017	Fifth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Fellowship of the Least Coin Sunday	<b>The Kingdom as a Forgiving Community</b>	Genesis 45:1-5 Acts 7:59-60	Being forgiving is a quality of those who belong to the Kingdom of God.
(45) October 1, 2017	Sixth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Worldwide Communion Sunday/CYAP Sunday	<b>Towards a Reconciled Community</b>	Genesis 45:9-15 Philemon 1:10-20	True reconciliation moves relationships to a higher plane.
(46) October 8, 2017	Seventh Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Peace Sunday	<b>Living the Faith</b>	Esther 4:13-16 James 1:27	Forgiven and reconciled, we

				are freed to do good.
(47) October 15, 2017	Eighth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ UCM Sunday	<b>Being Accepted in the Kingdom of God</b>	Hosea 1: 1-3, 3:1 John 4:7-15	The Christian community is accepting of others unmindful of any advantage.
(48) October 22, 2017	Ninth Sunday in Kingdomtide/Solidarity with Indigenous People Sunday	<b>Reverence for Life</b>	Exodus 2:1-10 Luke 7:1-10	Life is respected beyond social class, ethnicity, and religion.
(49) October 29, 2017	Tenth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Reformation Sunday	<b>Discerning God's Ways through Jesus</b>	Job 42:1-6 John 14:5-11	To know Jesus is to know God. The gospel makes faith simple to everyone.
November 5, 2017 (50)	Eleventh Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Church Workers Sunday	<b>Prayerful Life</b>	Daniel 6:6-23 Mark 14:32-38	Communing with God through prayers encompasses all of life.
(51) November 12, 2017	Twelfth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Theological Education Sunday	<b>Audacious Compassion</b>	1 Kings 17:8-16 Luke 10:25-37	Those who have less in life or regarded low are the most compassionate.
(52) November 19, 2017	Thirteenth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Migrant Workers Sunday	<b>Learning from the Faith and Witness of Migrants</b>	Psalms 137:1-6 1 Peter 1:1 James 1:1-4	Being steadfast in the faith makes us complete and whole.
(53) November 26, 2017	Fourteenth Sunday in Kingdomtide/ Stewardship Sunday	<b>Service Motivated by Love</b>	Judges 5:6-13 Mark 2:1-12	Stewardship is manifested through the collective response of the faith community.

Quadrennial Theme: **SPIRITUALITY FOR THESE CRITICAL TIMES**Year 3 Theme: **Human Degradation and Spirituality for a New Humanity CC 2016-2017**Scope 1: ***Rootedness in the Faith***Strand 1: ***Jesus' Encounters with Human Degradation and its Transformation***Season: ***Advent and Christmastide***Age Level: ***Middle and Older Elementary*****November 27, 2016**First Sunday of Advent: **Liberating Cultural Breakthroughs*****Old Testament: 1 Samuel 25:13-34***

13David said to his men, 'Every man strap on his sword!' And every one of them strapped on his sword; David also strapped on his sword; and about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, 'David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he shouted insults at them. 15Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we never missed anything when we were in the fields, as long as we were with them; 16they were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. 17Now therefore know this and consider what you should do; for evil has been decided against our master and against all his house; he is so ill-natured that no one can speak to him.'

18 Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. She loaded them on donkeys 19and said to her young men, 'Go on ahead of me; I am coming after you.' But she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20As she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, David and his men came down towards her; and she met them. 21Now David had said, 'Surely it was in vain that I protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; but he has returned me evil for good. 22God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of all who belong to him.'

23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried and alighted from the donkey, and fell before David on her face, bowing to the ground. 24She fell at his feet and said, 'Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. 25My lord, do not take seriously this ill-natured fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent.

26 'Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, since the Lord has restrained you from blood-guilt and from taking vengeance with your own hand, now let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be like Nabal. 27And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. 28Please forgive the trespass of your servant; for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord; and evil shall not be found in you as long as you live. 29If anyone should rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living under the care of the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies he

shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. 30When the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, 31my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for having saved himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.'

32 David said to Abigail, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! 33Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from blood-guilt and from avenging myself by my own hand! 34For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there would not have been left to Nabal as much as one male.'

#### *New Testament: Matthew 1:18-24*

##### **The Birth of Jesus the Messiah**

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' 22All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' 24When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

**General Concept:** There are cultural practices and beliefs that cause human suffering and degradation, thus, the church should make a cultural breakthrough in the transformation towards a new humanity.

##### **Key Concept: (Middle and Older Elementary)**

**Jesus gives gifts to children to use in overcoming cultural biases in the community.**

#### **Exegesis of the Biblical References**

The story narrated in the text of 1 Samuel 25: 13-34 talks of the successful attempt of Abigail to defuse a situation in her own family and community that could have exploded into a very violent incident. It could have cost the lives of many people including her own husband Nabal. This is because of the fugitive David's very angry reaction to the response of Nabal to his request for a little share of the goods that Nabal, a rich man, had. Nabal owned several thousands of sheep and goats in his own territory in Carmel where they were shearing sheep at that time. David claims that he had been providing some measure of security and protection for Nabal and his people out in the fields with the flocks and herd. David was simply making a modest request in behalf of his own men who, owing to their fugitive situation, were being sustained only by the generosity of people in various communities that they pass through. They have been running and hiding from the forces of King Saul who were out to kill David for being a threat to his hold on the throne of Israel. David wanted an expression of support and care from people like Nabal who has everything and very much in a position to give even a small part of his livestock.

In rage because of the rejection made by Nabal, David immediately ordered his men to attack

the camp of Nabal and inflict a bloody response to Nabal and his people. It was Abigail however who prevented this bloody encounter between David and Nabal by immediately going to David with a load of goods that she brought to David to appease his anger. She humbled herself and tactfully and diplomatically pleaded before David in behalf of her husband. This act of Abigail, for a woman to go out of her way, humble herself before a man and personally plead in behalf of her own husband, is something unprecedented in the ancient patriarchal culture of Israel. Women are not supposed to approach a man in behalf of another man. Women are not supposed to speak to a man who is not her husband nor a family relative.

What Abigail did is quite radical and a major breakthrough in terms of crossing cultural barriers. If Abigail acted or reacted only within the confines and expectations of her own culture, if she simply remained quiet and passive in the midst of such critical situation, a terrible bloodshed and widespread loss of lives could have needlessly occurred. Regardless of whatever her culture may say, a woman acted and took the initiative to directly approach a stranger and plead humbly but boldly in behalf of her husband and community who are all in danger because of the foolishness of her husband. Despite cultural restrictions, a woman became a savior of her own family and community. Those who are regarded as cultural “outsiders”, like women, are themselves very vital sources of liberating voices and presence. This will set the pattern of how the one who is coming and being awaited in this advent season to become the savior-liberator is one who belongs to such category of being an “outsider” himself.

Because of obvious socio-cultural expectations regarding women in Israel, in light of the unexplained, sudden pregnancy of Mary (Matt. 1:18-24), Joseph, being a just and righteous man had actually thought of quietly divorcing Mary. He would not want to lose face before his community as a man who is going to marry a woman pregnant not with his own child. This is something very understandable in a highly patriarchal society, where manly pride and honor are always valued more highly than the welfare of women who may be in danger of simply being abandoned by the rest of the community and consigned to condemnation or possible death by stoning. Mary could have lived for the rest of her life as an ostracized single mother if not stoned to death if Joseph pursued his prior plan to quietly divorce her. But God’s ways and plans cannot be prevented from being realized by the limitations and restrictions of culture. God will act and pursue such plans using people who may even be products of such culture but who are willing to set aside such cultural restrictions for the sake of obeying and following the voice and will of God for the liberation of God’s people. Because Joseph obeyed the voice of God through an angel that spoke to him in a dream, Joseph laid aside everything and did whatever the LORD had commanded him. The rest is history of how hope was born and God’s plan was carried out in spite and despite cultural barriers which were clearly ignored and even violated by Joseph if only to obey and become a faithful instrument of God’s plans for God’s people. This decision by Joseph, marked Mary’s own liberation from an otherwise very enslaving cultural tradition.

In the Philippine context, we need to acknowledge the reality that not all marriages stemming from similar situations as that of Mary may result in a liberating experience for the woman who got pregnant. A number of such marriages may actually result to a greater degree of degradation and victimization of women. This is true especially if the marriage has been effected as mainly due to parental pressure and as a face-saving measure for the parents and for the rest of the family of the woman, and if those to be married do not have any degree of mutual love and commitment to each other. In such a context, the church must study even more carefully the situation and nature of each case and discern the kind of more redemptive options available to ensure that the woman concerned will be accorded the support that will still lead her to a more liberating, empowering experience.

## Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Culture is like second nature which is a powerful determinant of human behavior. As the prophet Isaiah said, he couldn't help but speak in sin because he was born amongst people of "unclean lips." But culture is a secondary behavior, not inborn like human instinct, hence it can be overcome. When God created humankind God said that it was good, not sinful by nature. But as sinfulness got ingrained in human culture, people came to believe that sinfulness was natural, hence the saying, "We're only human." For example, there are cultural beliefs that tend to put women at the disadvantage in the home, workplace, as well as in the church. These are often justified by a misuse of Biblical passages. The same is true of cultural bias and prejudice against LGBT people, mistaking culture to be human nature ordained by God. Thus, culture is a carrier of society's collective sins that everyone participates in.

There is also the culture that legitimizes the use of superior power, intelligence and wealth to deprive other people of the means to a decent life, condemning masses of people to extreme poverty. Philippine government statistics show that there 26 million who are poor and 12 million of which are so very poor as to be unable to eat 3 times a day. The culture of poverty among the poor makes them accept their lot in life and prevents them from taking action to change their situation.

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul urged them not to be enslaved by the old life (culture) but to practice their freedom to live righteously. This means overcoming the power of sinfulness (the sinful system that makes people poor) that is embedded in culture. It means leading a transformed life every day until that new life becomes like second nature (culture) replacing the old nature (culture).

### I. Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

1. Describe the gifts each one has received from God
2. Explain how these gifts are used in overcoming cultural biases
3. Demonstrate appreciation for their gifts that enable them to participate in overcoming cultural biases
4. Do creative work in showing their commitment to overcoming cultural biases

- II. Concept:** Jesus gives gifts to children to use in overcoming cultural biases in the community.

**Materials:** The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), crayons/colored pentel pens, manila paper, glue, bamboo strips for making placards

### III. Learning Experiences

#### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet each child and lead him/her to a seat. Welcome them to the Middle Elementary/Older Elementary Sunday School class. Thank them for coming. Introduce everyone and yourself if there are new comers.
2. Opening songs: Begin the session with praise songs and songs that will introduce them to each other.
  - a. "Jesus is a Happy Name"

- b. "It's a Great Thing to Praise the Lord"
- c. Praise songs in the local language
- 3. Opening prayer: Lead the children in prayer. Remind them what prayer is and how to pray properly.  
Suggested prayer: "We praise and thank you, God, for bringing us safely to church today. Help us to listen and to learn what you want us to do. Teach us to love and care for others as You love us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

#### **B. Getting Ready**

1. Have the children say what gifts or good characteristics they think they have received from God. Ask them to describe these. Take note of their answers.
2. Ask the children if they are able to observe people hurting other people, whether children or adults, in the home, school and community. Ask them to write these observations down or to tell about these. Ask them to share how these hurting behaviors affect those who are being hurt.
2. Lead the children to the scripture lesson by telling them that a long time ago, during Jesus' time, there were laws / rules / expectations in their society that tried to control the actions of people, even to the point of leading people to hurt others.

#### **C. Learning Time**

1. Ask the children to open their Bibles to the Scripture reference: Matthew 1:18-24. Assign each child to read a verse. If there are more children than verses to be read, you may assign them in pairs or three to a verse. After that give them time to read the story silently.
2. Check if the children understood what was read, by asking:
  - For ME
    - Who were the main characters of the story?
    - What did the angel say and do? What did Mary say and do? What did Joseph say and do?
  - For OE
    - What was the story all about?
      - Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married
      - The angel spoke to Mary and told her she will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit
      - Joseph thought of divorcing Mary
      - The angel spoke to Joseph and told him to marry Mary
      - Joseph married Mary

#### **D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time**

Enrich their understanding by providing additional information on:

1. What might have happened if Joseph did not marry Mary? (Show pictures of a woman being stoned to death and a man being laughed at by other men).
  - Mary would be ostracized (disliked) or stoned to death, for getting pregnant before getting married, according to their laws.
  - If Joseph divorced Mary because she got pregnant but not by him, he would be the laughing stock in the community, according to their customs.
2. Because Joseph married her, what happened to Mary? (Show the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus)
  - He saved Mary and the unborn Jesus
  - He saved himself from shame / humiliation
  - He showed his obedience to God and his love for Mary

3. What could have happened if Joseph did not obey God?

4. What did Joseph do and why?

(Joseph disregarded the degrading laws / expectations in order to obey God and show his love for God and Mary.)

Ask the children to identify the character traits of Joseph from the story. Ask if they think these traits are acceptable to God and would they like to follow / emulate / imitate Joseph.

**E. *Discovering the Biblical Truth***

1. Ask: How may you use your God-given gifts in overcoming cultural biases in the community?

2. Have each child share what she/he can do to overcome cultural biases vis-à-vis the gifts each one mentioned at the beginning of the class.

**F. *Applying the Biblical Truth***

1. Help children to master the memory verse: Matthew 1:24 – “So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord told him to.”

2. Assign children into small groups. Let each group pick out a situation from their observations about people hurting other people, which they shared at the beginning of the class. The teacher may also assign a situation to each group. Instruct them to role play the situation and show what they would do to overcome the situation, in obedience to God.

Examples of situations that may be assigned to each group if the children cannot select from their own experiences:

- In school, they see a gang of pupils bullying another pupil, what should they do?
- At home, when a father is abusing his wife and children, what should they do?
- In the community, they observe children teasing a person with disability, what should they do?

**G. *Creative Activity***

Let the children make placards denouncing an oppressive behavior or promoting positive behavior. Let them march around the room and around the church premises with their placards.

Examples:

“Stop bullying!”

“Love One another”

“Obey God!”

(Option: The children can make posters)

**H. *Closing Worship***

1. Together recite the memory verse.

2. Offering: Sing “Give Your Heart to Jesus” or any offertory song in the local language.

3. Closing song: (about obedience to God)

4. Closing prayer. The teacher may ask the children to repeat the prayer, in phrases, after him/her.

Suggested Prayer: Thank You, God, for the lessons we have learned today. Help us to be more like Joseph—loving, obedient and brave. Forgive us for hurting other people and help us to do what You want us to do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**December 4, 2016**Second Sunday of Advent: **Seeds of New Humanity***Old Testament: Isaiah 7:14*

14Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

*New Testament: Luke 1:26-35*

## The Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' 34 Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' 35 The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'

*General Concept:* **Like the enslaved people in Egypt, the new humanity emerges from among the victims who long for freedom and wholeness.** (Dec 1: HIV/AIDS Day)

*Key Concept: (Middle and Older Elementary)*  
**Children are encouraged to enjoy freedom and equality to worship God.**

**Exegesis of the Biblical References**

The text of Isaiah 7:14 reflects a situation of grave crisis in the life of the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem had been under siege by a coalition of two allied kingdoms, Israel or the Northern Kingdom and the kingdom of Syria or Aram. They were coercing Judah into joining their coalition so that together they can fight the emerging superpower at that time which was Assyria. The prophet Isaiah had been advising King Ahaz of Judah not to be afraid of the coalition and not to join them, but to just remain calm and quiet. According to Isaiah, these two allied nations trying to attack them are actually just smoldering stumps of firebrands that will soon consume themselves (7:4-8). Ahaz however, appears unconvinced of the advice of the prophet. In his frustration that the king seemingly remains unaffected and unmoved by what he had been saying, the prophet then pronounced the classic statement in 7:14: "Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel". The name of the child means, "With us, is God" or God is with us. The prophet here wanted the king to realize the one abiding truth about their God Yahweh: that this God has always been with God's people, especially in times of crisis, and as sure as a pregnant woman will eventually give birth, God will continue to be with them. In times of intense political, economic and even personal crisis, the history of Israel has always been marked by the continuing interventions of God. The crisis in Ahaz time is no exception. This God of Israel has always been and will always be with God's people Israel as their liberator, redeemer, sustainer, source of power and strength. The time of the crisis in Ahaz' time however becomes somewhat special and different. This time,

God's being with God's people, God being Immanuel, becomes manifested through the coming of a child. The sign of hope for Israel's redemption in a time of a grave political-military crisis will come through the birth of a baby. The assurance that God remains with God's people and will never abandon them will be the birth of a baby who will bear in a more concrete form the message of the redemption of God's people from all forces of degradation in the present and even in the future. This is what the Christian interpreters have seen in this passage that led them to connect this prophecy originally addressed to a king of Judah to become a message of hope that point to the coming of a messiah for the renewal and transformation of humanity and of the world in the form of a baby born in a manger, not a regular home, and by a peasant mother who faces the prospect of social marginalization. Hope for a new humanity is born even among those who are consigned and rendered to the margins of society by the powerful of this world.

The text in Luke 1:26-35 speaks of the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary the very special privilege of being favored by God to become the mother of the messiah who will come to establish God's reign with the power of love and not of might. The messiah is described as one who will assume the greatness of David, who will establish his reign over Israel which will then have no end. Mary was so astonished to hear such an unbelievable task being assigned to her by God, conscious of her standing in her society in Nazareth, where she is already betrothed to be married to Joseph. But the announcement of the angel indicates that she will soon conceive and bear a son even when she is still a virgin. This is why she expressed her deep surprise when she exclaimed, "But how can this be, since I have no husband?"

Again, the announcement of the angel affirms only the truth that God's plans to save God's people goes beyond and does not conform to social and even physical and biological expectations. God can use human instruments to carry out the divine plan independent of the expectations of society. This proclamation becomes even significant because God now will use an innocent, virgin, peasant girl to become the mother of God's own sent son to be the messiah. The grand divine salvation plan does not occur using people with prominent status, honorable positions and names, righteous individuals. God will choose even the least, the insignificant, those considered dregs of society, victims of a highly oppressive and exploitative system, to become instruments in effecting the most radical attempt to transform and redeem humanity. From their ranks and from their voices, like the voice of Mary, we will hear and discern the emergence of a truly new humanity and a new world to be embodied in the coming of a baby born in a manger in a stable by a virgin mother who herself has been longing and praying for wholeness for her and her own people, even as she surrenders her whole life and future into the hands of her only Lord and God "Let it be!..."(v.38).

### **Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users**

The Hebrew people who fled Egypt were God's "experiment of a new humanity." Having been freed from slavery and enjoying the freedom to worship their newfound God rather than the gods of their captors, the people of Israel were meant to be a "light to the nations." It was as though humankind was created all over again. Freedom and equality—every family given equal portions of land, no supreme ruler/king from among them but God—was established as the foundation of a new nation. The biblical faith shows that God does not allow evil and wickedness to have the last word in history. God has the last say by recreating a portion of humankind to constitute a new recreated humankind. Israel was this portion but in the end failed. The church is supposed to be the new Israel, that portion of humankind that is supposed to demonstrate the qualities of a new humanity. The church may yet fail. But we've seen God's design for a new humanity—they always come from the world's victims who continue to witness to God's truth and righteousness (the martyrs in the

Book of Revelation) not from the high and mighty. This is a never ending work of God until a new humankind will finally emerge from the face of the earth.

### I. Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

1. Describe the programs in the church that enable children to worship and serve God freely
2. Realize that Jesus came to bring freedom and equality among people
3. Make one's resolve to participate in bringing about freedom and equality

**II. Concept:** Children are encouraged to enjoy freedom and equality to worship God.

**Materials:** The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), pencils, bond paper, crayons, box with cover or a big bottle with cover and wrapped in gaily colored wrappers or ribbons, stapler

### III. Learning Experiences

#### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children warmly as they come. Check the attendance. Introduce new comers.
2. Opening prayer: (Suggested Prayer)  
We thank you, dear God, for this beautiful Sunday morning. We thank You that we are able to worship You freely and to learn more about You through Jesus Christ. Open our minds and hearts to our lesson this morning. Bless each one so that whatever we learn here will guide us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
3. Suggested opening songs:  
"This is the Day"  
This is the day, this is the day  
That the Lord has made, that the Lord has made.  
We will rejoice, we will rejoice  
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.  
For this is the day that the Lord has made,  
We will rejoice and be glad in it.  
This is the day, this is the day  
That the Lord has made.  
"It's a Great Thing to Praise the Lord"  
It's a great thing to praise the Lord, (3x)  
Walking in the light of God,  
Walk, walk, walk, walk in the light (3x)  
Walking in the light of God.  
(substitute praise with love and serve)  
Other songs which are in the local language, may be sung.  
Songs are best sung with actions.

#### B. Getting Ready

1. To set the tone, the teacher may display mongo seeds, potted mongo sprouts and potted mongo plants on the table. This is to portray that out of small things come big things. The mongo seeds become plants that supply us with food.

2. Ask the class to identify objects in their environment that are small but which are useful.
3. Point out the mongo seeds that grow into plants that provide food.
4. Lead them to the lesson by telling them that sometimes being small is considered unimportant just like Mary, who as a woman, was considered unimportant and insignificant to others because she was a woman, very young and from a poor family.

#### *C. Learning Time*

1. Scripture Reading: Ask the children to open their Bibles to Luke 1:26-38. The verses may be read responsively, starting with the teacher, and ending with the reading of the last verse together.
2. The teacher checks if the children have understood what they read by asking:
  - a. Who was Mary?
  - b. What did the angel say to her?
  - c. How did Mary react (v. 29: She was deeply troubled).
  - d. Why do you think she was troubled? (She was afraid; she felt unimportant, incapable)
  - e. How did she respond? (She said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."). This means that she obeyed what God wanted her to do.

#### *D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time*

Discuss the following with the children:

1. Recall from last Sunday's lesson that there were laws and customs in Mary's time that made women very small in society and low in status and powerless. They were less important than men. If married, they had to be submissive to their husband.
2. God's announcement to make Mary the mother of a King was so hard to believe considering her status in society – young, poor, powerless and unimportant.
3. Despite and because of her humble status, God chose her to do a very important work, which is to be the mother of Jesus.
4. Children had the same status as women. They were not as important as men.
5. The birth of Jesus was God's way of giving importance to all, including women and children. It was God's way of telling us that we are all equal in God's eyes and are free to worship and serve God.

Let the children share:

1. About how they can participate in the life work of the church (taking communion, going to church, attending Sunday School, giving offerings, reading the Bible, praying, telling others about Jesus, etc.)
2. About activities / programs of the church they enjoy doing or that they want to join

#### *E. Discovering the Biblical Truth*

1. Ask the children what else they learned from the story.
2. Emphasize that God encourages children to freely join in worshipping and serving God, no matter how small or unimportant they feel.
3. Tell them that Jesus came to earth to bring freedom and equality to all

*F. Applying the Biblical Truth*

1. Help the children master the memory verse: Luke 1: 28: "The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you".
2. Enjoin the children to do the following activities:

For ME:

The children can make a "promissory note" to attend / join church activities or serve God in their own ways. They will write down their promise on a piece of paper which they can artfully design.

For OE:

The children can make a "Dear Jesus" letter to promise to join / attend church activities and tell how they can serve God in their own ways. They can make art designs on their letters.

The teacher will fold and staple the paper and put the child's name on top. The teacher will provide a "Promise / Letter Box or Bottle" wrapped in gaily colored paper or ribbons. Cover the box or bottle and keep for future use.

Examples of promises:

- I promise to attend Sunday School regularly
- I promise to read the Bible
- I promise to pray for others
- I promise to save money for Sunday offering
- I promise to tell others about Jesus

*G. Closing Worship*

1. Lead children to recite the memory verse.
2. Offering: Remind the children that we can offer to God not only money but our time and talents and our lives to God and that God loves a cheerful giver. While the offering is being given, the class may sing,  
"Giving, giving, gladly giving day by day,  
Giving, giving, gladly day by day."  
(Any offering song in the local language may be sung.)
3. Closing prayer: (Suggested Prayer)  
Thank You, dear God, for lessons learned in Sunday School this morning. Thank You that You love little children and that we can freely worship and serve You. Help us to keep our promises and to do what pleases You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**December 11, 2016**

Third Sunday of Advent/Human Rights Sunday: **Challenging Oppressive Powers**

***Old Testament: 1 Kings 12:1-16***

12Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. 2When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. 3And they sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 4"Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you." 5He said to them, "Go away for three days, then come again to me." So the people went away.

6 Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" 7They answered

him, "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants for ever." 8But he disregarded the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. 9He said to them, "What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, 'Lighten the yoke that your father put on us'?" 10The young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus you should say to this people who spoke to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us'; thus you should say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. 11Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"

12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had said, "Come to me again on the third day." 13The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the older men had given him 14and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." 15So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill his word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

16 When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, "What share do we have in David?

We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.

To your tents, O Israel!

Look now to your own house, O David."

So Israel went away to their tents.

**New Testament: Luke 2:1-6**

2In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

**General Concept: The church has the duty to expose and challenge state policies that violate human rights.**

**Key Concept: (Middle and Older Elementary)**

**Children are instructed to uphold the dignity of other children by accepting them and respecting their rights.**

### **Exegesis of the Biblical References**

The text in 1 Kings recounts the story of how the once mighty and powerful United Kingdom of Israel became divided because of the highly oppressive and exploitative policies of the rulers, one manifestation of which was the imposition of heavy taxes on the people. This policy of taxation actually started with David but it became worse during the regime of his son Solomon. He was the one who employed the policy of forced labor among his own people. He created twelve districts which cut across the old tribal boundaries. He required male citizens to render free labor to the state in various infrastructure projects which really intensified during his time. Under his rule, the temple in Jerusalem was built, a dream of his father David. It was a project

carried out by relying on Phoenician architecture and Phoenician timber which had to be cut from the cedar trees in the Lebanon mountains. The cut logs would then have to be dragged down from the mountains up to the shores of the Mediterranean and then floated down off the shore southward until they reached the port of Joppa. From there, the logs were then hauled up to the mountains going to the city of Jerusalem. The enormous distance involved surely take a heavy toll on the life and safety of the people who transported the materials and constructed the temple itself (5:13-14). The temple project took seven years to complete (6:38). But Solomon even had more building projects in mind. He then proceeded to build his own palace complex which was completed in 13 years (7:1) using the same method of transporting materials and construction. There were other infrastructure projects carried out by Solomon such as a number of military fortifications. In all these, he employed forced labor from the male citizens.

At the same time, the cost of building such major infrastructure projects compelled Solomon to require an enormous amount of taxation from his people in the form of various goods and agricultural products (4:22). This was the heavy burden complained about by the people especially from those coming from the northern territories who had far richer resources than the southern region of Judah. These subjects from the north then trooped to appeal to the new king Rehoboam, the son of Solomon who had just taken over when his father died. The people of the north were hoping they would be able to receive a more humane treatment from the son of a very exploitative father. Rehoboam however, listened to the counsel of his fellow young officers in the court and ignored the advice of the elders in the palace who had been with his father Solomon. He announced in response that "If my father had beaten you with a yoke, I will now beat you up with scorpions!" (12:13). This indicates the intensification of the oppressive and exploitative taxation and forced labor policies employed by his father. The people were so enraged in hearing this and immediately they declared their cessation and rebellion from the kingdom of David and set up their own kingdom with Jeroboam as their first king (12:16-20). Major upheavals and even rebellions and divisions in a nation are normally caused by very unjust and oppressive policies of rulers. This is a reality that persists even today. This the church has to expose and oppose as part of its ministry and mission.

The story of the birth of the baby Jesus (Luke 2:1-6) has been traditionally recalled and reflected upon with very romantic and idealistic assumptions. We need to pay attention however to the fact that Jesus was born in an environment characterized by so much power abuse and unjust policies of the ruling powers then such as the Roman colonial empire. The story clearly testifies to the fact that the context of the birth of Jesus was a context filled with much suffering by the ordinary subjects of the empire such as the Jewish peasants. Jesus' parents were Jewish peasants. They were among the numerous ones who were compelled to obey a very unjust and cruel policy of requiring all subjects of the empire to be registered or fully identified right in their own places of birth. There is no exemption even for women who are heavy with child or about to give birth. Still, they have to travel to where they should register as subjects. This is one of the rigid instruments of population control by the empire as a basis for the formulation of two typical imperial concerns: the imposition of a more systematic means of taxation and at the same time of forced recruitment into the imperial army. It is either that the Jewish citizens are required to pay a uniform tax rate or they will be summoned to render service to the Roman army when it becomes necessary such as in times of war and invasion.

Thus the birth of Jesus comes right amidst a situation when the Jewish people have been crying and longing for some rescue from their very desperate and enslaving situation under the Roman colonial domination. They have been hoping and waiting for so long for the coming of a savior who would stand to expose and oppose such unjust and inhuman treatment they have been enduring under successive colonial powers. With the coming of Jesus, hope was rekindled in

the hearts of the people like the shepherds who were the first ones who were able to gaze at the sight of the newly born baby. The sight of the baby lying in the manger should not however be romanticized and frozen as the representative image of what Christmas is all about. Advent and Christmas is all about a major breakthrough in an otherwise very painful history of the Jewish people. It manifests the truth that God had not and will never abandon God's people. God will surely act even in a most unexpected way using unexpected instruments to carry out God's saving and redeeming plans for all God's children. This even in the midst of great and centuries-long historical crisis and political oppression. The rulers' abuse of their power, unjust policies and repressive measures, setting aside any minimal respect for the worth and dignity and even basic rights of their subjects, have to be brought to light as the very context of God's decisive saving action. God acted in the birth of Jesus not in an atmosphere of serene and peaceful social surroundings. God acted in a context of so much terrifying socio-economic and political crisis and victimization of peoples. This is the reason why Jesus came and the reason why the church has to carry on pursuing the mission and ministry of her Lord Jesus Christ.

### Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

As the late Sen. Jose W. Diokno said, human rights are those rights that make humans human. Created in God's image, every human being has this image ruined when they are robbed of their rights and dignity. Wicked people have no regard for the rights of the weak and the innocent because they do not recognize God's image that is inherent in every person. Believers in whatever faith community they belong testify to this truth about human beings as a *matter of faith*. For Christians, faith is denied when believers fail to defend human rights. Those who willfully trample on people's rights have essentially stepped out of the community of faith and would need to repent and make amends to their victims in order to be restored back to the Christian community. This is a redemptive act for human rights violators.

It is universally accepted in international law that only agents of the state can commit violation of human rights. Human rights violations must be distinguished from common crimes which are committed by citizens against fellow citizens. That is because plain citizens have no power against the state which alone holds the right to the use of armed violence. International agreements, laws and protocols on human rights are meant to protect the citizens from the state's arbitrary use of coercion and violence.

Christians believe that God's authority is over and above governments. Based on this conviction, the church has the duty to call upon the state to be compliant to God's will. The purpose is to protect the powerless and the innocent from further harm and *also* to help the state to be a faithful instrument to execute God's justice or else suffer God's wrath and be destroyed.

#### I. Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

1. Enumerate the rights of children
2. Share situations when these rights are upheld
3. React to situations when these rights are not upheld
4. Conclude that upholding human rights is by accepting and respecting others
5. Commit to uphold the rights of other children with Jesus as the model

**II. Concept:** Children are instructed to uphold the dignity of other children by accepting them and respecting their rights.

**Materials:** The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), child-friendly poster on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, meta cards or strips of bond paper, pencils, masking tape

### III. Learning Experiences

#### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children warmly as they come. Check the attendance. Introduce new comers, if there are any.
2. Opening prayer: (Suggested Prayer)  
Dear God, thank you for bringing us safely to church this morning. We praise You for You are worthy of praise. Help us to open our hearts and minds to our lesson this morning. Teach us to love one another as You love us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
3. A getting to know each other game may be played. A suggested game is "zip, zap, zop". Children are seated in a big circle. Instruct them to get the name of the child on their left and on their right. An "it" will go around saying "zip, zap, zop" and point to anyone with either zip or zap. For zip, the child the "it" points at will say the name of the child on the left; for zap, the name of the child on the right will be said. This goes on until the "it" says "zop" and all the children will change seats. The "it" will get a seat and the one who doesn't get a seat will be the next "it" and the game will start again.
4. Sing action songs. Suggested songs:  
 "Si Hesus ang Sandigan" (This is sung with a partner)  
 Si Hesus and sandigan (lean on your partner)  
 Hindi magigiba (shake pointer finger) (repeat first 2 lines)  
 Kasing tatag (bend an elbow and make a fist)  
 Ng kabundukan (draw a mountain with your hand)  
 Hindi magigiba (shake pointer finger)  
 (Substitute Hesus with ako, ikaw, tayo, pag-ibig. In the last round, mention all)  
 "Jesus Loves the Little Children"  
 Jesus loves the little children,  
 All the children of the world  
 Brown, red, yellow, black and white  
 They are precious in His sight  
 Jesus loves the little children of the world.  
 Any song in the local language may also be sung

#### B. Getting Ready

1. Ask children if they know what their rights are. Let each write down the rights that they know on a piece of paper and stick the paper on the board. Process the information and group ideas similar to each other. (The summary list below may be used to group their responses.)
  - Show the child-friendly poster on Rights of Children (according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)
  - You may summarize the rights of children into these (may be written on meta cards):
    - To be born, to have a name and nationality
    - To have a family who will love and care for me
    - To live in a peaceful community and a wholesome environment
    - To have adequate food and a healthy and active body

- To obtain a good education and develop my potential
  - To be given opportunities for play and leisure
  - To be protected against abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence and danger
  - To be defended and given assistance by the government
  - To be able to express my own views.
2. Let the children share situations in which these rights are not being upheld and how they react to these situations.
  3. Lead them to the scripture reference by telling them that a long time ago even before Jesus was born, the situation in his society was lacking in respect to rights of persons.

#### *C. Learning Time*

1. Ask the class to open their Bibles to the scripture reference: Luke 2: 1-6. Ask them to read silently.
2. Allow 2 or 3 children to retell the story.
3. Ask the class to answer the following questions:
  - a. Why were Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem in Judea?
  - b. What was Mary's condition during the trip?
  - c. Do you think she should have taken the trip? Why or why not?

#### *D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time*

1. Give the children greater understanding on the social situation at that time by providing the information:
  - a. That the registration of persons was a decree made by the powerful Emperor Augustus
  - b. That the registration was a way of determining the taxes to be taken from the people
  - c. That the registration was also a way of identifying those people who will be forced to serve in the army
  - d. Nobody was exempted from the registration, not even a pregnant woman about to give birth.
  - e. The Roman government was oppressive, so the Jewish people longed for a savior who would save them from such oppression.
  - f. Jesus was born in such oppressive times and was sent by God to give hope to the people.
2. Ask the children what they think are the human rights that were violated in the story.

#### *E. Discovering the Biblical Truth*

1. Ask the children what it means to uphold human rights.
2. Would they agree that it means accepting and respecting others?

#### *F. Applying the Biblical Truth*

1. Help the children master the memory verse: 1 John 3:18, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth."
2. For ME:  
Let each child make a commitment to choose a person in his school, home, or community to which he / she will show acceptance and respect. Let each child indicate how to do it. Let them write it down and keep it so they are constantly reminded of it.  
Examples:

- a. I will share my toys with my brother / sister / cousin / friend (name of person)
  - b. I will make friends with the pupil at school that is always being teased by others
  - c. I will share my food / snack with \_\_\_\_\_ (name of another child)
  - d. I will stop teasing \_\_\_\_\_ (name of another child)
3. For OE:
- Let the children discuss among themselves how they can show acceptance of and respect for others in the home, school and church. Divide the class into three groups. Assign each group to an area (either home, school or church). Let them make a list. Let each group share their group output. Allow others to comment on their output.
- The teacher will synthesize the sharing and emphasize that Jesus is our model in upholding the dignity and rights of others.

### G. Closing Worship

1. Lead the children to recite the memory verse.
2. Offering: Remind children that giving of offerings is an important part of worship and that God loves a cheerful giver. A song may be sung while the offering is being collected.

“Give Thanks” (Suggested song)

Give thanks with a grateful heart

Give thanks to the Holy One

Give thanks because God’s given Jesus Christ God’s Son

And now, let the weak say, “I am strong”

Let the poor say, “I am rich,”

Because of what the Lord has done, for us

Give thanks.

A prayer of thanksgiving may be said. The teacher may ask the children to repeat after her.

3. Closing song: “Ako ay Babae, Ako ay Lalake” (Suggested Song)

(B) Ako ay isang babae,

(L) Ako ay isang lalake

(S) Pareho tayong may isip,

Parehong may galing.

(L) Kaya kong tumakbo

(B) Kaya kong tumalon

(L) Kaya kong tumalon

(B) At kaya kong tumakbo.

(L) Pagkat ikaw ay babae

(B) At ikaw ay lalake

(S) Pareho tayong may isip,

Parehong may galing.

B (Babae)

L (Lalaki)

S (Sabay)

(Music and Words Unknown: Children Praise God: Song Book for Children, compiled by Esther Ferido-Camino, 2003)

4. Closing prayer: "Dear God, forgive us when we reject and disrespect others. Teach us to always show respect and to love others like Jesus did. Thank you for the lessons we learned today and bless each one to do what God wants us to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **December 18, 2016**

Fourth Sunday of Advent: **Jesus as God's Love Incarnate**

*Old Testament: Isaiah 49:1-3*

The Servant's Mission

1 Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away!

The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.

3 And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'

*New Testament: John 3:11-17*

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

*General Concept: In the midst of a broken humanity, God came in Jesus to mend it and make it whole.*

*Key Concepts for the Age Levels: (Middle and Older Elementary)*

**Jesus came to us to have a new human community that has been healed of its brokenness.**

### **Exegesis of the Biblical References**

The text of Isaiah 49 comes right out of the context of the Babylonian Exile when Israel had gone through a very traumatic experience of being uprooted from their supposedly God-given land. They were forced to live in a foreign land in the midst of their captors where they have to adjust to the life of being strangers among a people worshiping a different god, living with a seemingly more advanced culture. There, they experienced being treated as second class citizens, a people without any rights, often becoming the object of derision and mockery of their own hosts-captors (e.g., Psalm 137). The reality of their being completely conquered by another nation, and the temple of their God being destroyed, their homes being razed to the ground, their women being abused and most of their men being executed (e.g., Lamentations 1-5) had simply left most of them in a deep state of shock. Earlier, these things were simply unthinkable

to them. They had assumed that because they had always been the chosen and beloved people of God who had always acted to save and protect them from their enemies, no calamity can ever befall them as a nation. They simply ignored the prophecies of the prophets like Jeremiah calling for a radical change and repentance on the part of the ruling elite, for them to turn towards the ways of what is just and righteous and uphold primarily the cause of the poor and the oppressed of the land (e.g. Jeremiah 22:13-16; Psalm 72). The resulting event was a totally unexpected disaster for the nation. It marked the end of the monarchy and the end of what they thought to be an era of freedom and sovereignty as a people. They were completely broken as a people, driven on the edge of hopelessness.

Now, they are forced to face the reality of facing a very uncertain, unclear future. They see no clear, discernible end to their being a captive people. They practically have been thrown into a situation of deep darkness and confusion. The prophet of the exile however sees another possibility in the midst of this grim reality. The prophet had discerned a far more significant future for the people other than being consigned to the life of a captive people. The prophet realizes that Israel has a very important calling from her God issued right even before they were born as a nation but only hidden for the moment by God like a polished arrow waiting for a right moment to be taken out of the quiver. The Lord, in fact, had called the people to be no less than to be a servant in whom the Lord will be glorified. The matter of becoming the mouthpiece of God, the very representative of God among the nations now becomes manifested not in the form of a royal, powerful figure, not in the habiliments of nobility, nor acquiring the identity of a kingly personality. The presence of God's representative who will act to personify the just and righteous will of the Lord for all his creatures will now be realized in the person of a servant. This will be the pattern for the way God will continue to reveal Godself in the ensuing history of God's relationship with God's people. Out of the deep darkness and brokenness of a people there will emerge a totally new act of God in the form of a servant who will come to heal the broken-hearted people through ways that are totally unexpected.

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:11-17), a well-educated Pharisee, may be reflective of the gospel writer's own conflict with the Jewish leaders of his own time several decades after Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus here describes to Nicodemus the very mystery behind the reality of the incarnation of Jesus as the Son of Man. It is this mystery of the incarnation that the Jewish elite like Nicodemus simply could not understand: that the Son of Man who was sent by God was able to ascend into heaven and was glorified and received the full reward of being a faithful servant and messiah only because he had the faith and courage to descend into the ugly realities of life here on earth. The incarnated one experienced all the contradictions, all the pain, as well as the joy and fulfillment of living the fullness of human life as an obedient son and servant of the Lord. All this is quite embedded in the mystery of what incarnation really means as an ultimate act of love of God. Jesus then pointed out that this has become possible for him to undertake only because of the love of God which he himself had personified. He knows that his presence has become the very manifestation of the deep love of God for the world, the world that is deeply imbedded in darkness and so much brokenness. It is this love of God made flesh, a love expressed in the very person of a suffering servant hanging on the cross, that has become the ultimate source of hope and light for the hopeless and those living in deep darkness. Jesus is the love of God, identifying itself with this broken and dark world. At the same time, this love of God in Jesus is the one that is also willing to sacrifice itself for the sake of his beloved. But the reality of the resurrection also reassures the faithful that this event will always stand for the love of God that is willing to empower the beloved for new life and a new future. This is the kind of God that we can always believe in and serve and witness to with all of our trust and hope for new life and a new future.

## Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

In Jesus of Nazareth, God came to earth to heal a broken creation. This shows the depth of God's love for God's creatures. It is the very same paradigm in which a victim—literally in the sense of Jewish sacrificial offering—suffers for the redemption of sinners. In Jesus, the sacrificial victim, God recreates humankind in a most original and novel way: Jesus, the human being, is the first and the beginning of a new being. Jesus invites everyone to follow his ways as the new human being.

By his sermons and teachings, Jesus gave the world a vision of a new human community in a new world wherein God himself will make his dwelling—the kingdom of God. This new community is composed of people who have been healed of disease, freed from the clutches of demonic powers, generous to the needy, kind to the weak, hospitable to strangers, welcoming to the outcast, forgiving to the wayward and willing to lay down their life for the sake of their friends. This is the face of the new world.

The Beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) spell out the inner life and orientation of the inhabitants of the kingdom of God: the poor in spirit, those who suffer tragedy, the meek, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. This vision of a new human community portrays a world that has been healed of its brokenness. Jesus founded the church ("You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church") in order to serve as his presence on earth. As Jesus was God's very presence on earth, the church has been called and formed to be Jesus' very presence on earth through its life, work and fellowship. In and through the church, Jesus' spirit continues to mend a broken creation until God's will of a healed and reconciled creation is realized.

### I. Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the children are expected to:

1. Say that God gave us Jesus because God loves us
2. Explain that Jesus came to make our world whole
3. Show appreciation for God's love

- II. **Concept:** Jesus came to us to have a new human community that has been healed of its brokenness.

**Materials:** The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), strips of paper, pencils, crayons

### III. Learning Experiences

#### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children warmly as they come. Check the attendance. Welcome and introduce new comers, if there are any.
2. Opening prayer: Loving God, thank you for this new day. Thank you for your loving care through the night. Bless us now as we worship you and learn more about Jesus, Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.
3. Lead the children in singing action songs:  
"This Is the Day"  
"Jesus Loves the Little Children"  
"Jesus Loves Me, This I Know"

**B. Getting Ready**

1. Teach the children the song, "For God So Loved the World"
 

For God so loved the world  
That He gave His only Son,  
To die on Calvary,  
From sin to set me free.  
Someday He's coming back  
What glory that will be.  
Wonderful His love for me.
2. After the class has mastered the song, divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 children each group. Instruct them to create movements / interpretative actions of the song. Give them 10 minutes to do this. After 10 minutes, ask each group to present what they created.
3. After the presentations, process the activity by asking them what they learned about the experience. Possible questions to ask:
  - Did they find difficulty in creating the movements/actions? Why or why not?
  - Which was the most fun part? Why?
  - What do they think is the message of the song?
  - Do they believe in the message?
  - Is it important to believe in the message in order to create the right movements/actions for the song? Why or why not?

**C. Learning Time**

1. Lead the class in the reading of the Scripture Lesson for the day: John 3: 11-17. The teacher may assign each verse to a student or the class can read responsively. Give the children some time to read the verses on their own silently.
2. Provide a brief background / context of the verses they have just read by pointing out that:
  - a. Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, a well-educated Pharisee, to whom Jesus was explaining that the coming of Jesus in to the world was God's ultimate expression of love for God's people and that Jesus came to save them from everything that oppressed them. The Pharisees did not believe this.
  - b. During the time of Jesus, there was so much oppression (e.g. people were being taxed heavily), so much injustice (many innocent people were being jailed), illnesses (those who were ill like the lepers were socially isolated), and there was so much pain and suffering that the people longed for a Savior.
  - c. Because of God's love for God's people, God sent Jesus, God's beloved Son, to show people how to be better human beings, how to care for each other, and how to show genuine love for each other.
3. At this point, the teacher may lead the class in singing "Jesus Went About Doing Good"
 

Jesus went about doing good, the Bible tells me so.  
He healed the sick and helped the blind  
To little children He was kind.  
He gave some hungry people food,  
He said to all, "Be kind and good".  
Jesus went about doing good,  
The Bible tells me so.

**D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time**

1. Ask the children to share their observations about the world we live in today, by asking these leading questions:
  - a. What are the signs / symptoms of a broken world that they can observe? (Examples: there are so many poor people while only a few are rich, many wars are going on around the world, children are being victimized, families are breaking up, there are many beggars, there are many sick people, there is bullying in school, the environment is continually destroyed by irresponsible mining, etc.)
  - b. How did Jesus try to heal this broken world? (By healing the sick, preaching, teaching, feeding, showing love and concern for others, talking against corruption and injustices caused by higher authorities, etc.)
  - c. What was Jesus' ultimate sacrifice to show His love for us? (By coming into this broken world, living with us, and dying on the cross for everything sinful)
2. Let the children perform their action song again together using the respective movement/actions that they created for the song "For God So Loved the World".

**E. Discovering the Biblical Truth**

Ask the children how God showed God's love for us, how we should respond, and what is the consequence of such response. (God showed God's love by sending God's Son Jesus to live with us here on earth to make our world whole. He died on the cross to free us from everything sinful. Our response is to believe in Him and we shall have eternal life.)

**F. Applying the Biblical Truth**

1. Help children to master the memory verse: John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life." We can show appreciation for God's love by loving Jesus, following Him and showing love for others.
2. For ME: Let the children draw a picture that shows how they can love other people. Have them label the drawing with: I will help heal this broken world.)  
For OE: Give children strips of paper and pencils and let them complete the statement: "I will show love/kindness to someone by \_\_\_\_\_." Encourage them to have varied responses. Allow them to share what they have written. Let them bring home the strips of paper to remind them of what they are going to do. They will report next meeting on what they have done about it.

**G. Closing Worship**

1. Lead children to recite the memory verse.
2. Offering: As the offering is being collected, the song "Give Your Heart to Jesus" may be sung.
3. Prayer of Thanksgiving: Encourage children to pray by asking if someone can lead in the prayer. Otherwise, the teacher may lead in the prayer and ask the children to repeat after him/her.
4. Closing song: "Thank You, Lord"  
 Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul  
 Thank You, Lord, for making me whole.  
 Thank You, Lord, for giving to me,  
 Thy great salvation, so rich and free.
5. Closing prayer: (Suggested Prayer)

We praise and thank You, O God, for Your great love for us. You gave us Your Son Jesus to be with us and to teach us how to love You and others, so that this world will be a better place to live in. Jesus gave his life for us. Help us and guide us to always follow Jesus. Amen.

### **December 25, 2016**

Christmas Day: **The Birth of Jesus**

*Old Testament: Psalm 91:11*

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

*New Testament: Luke 2:7-18*

7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

**John 1:14**

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

*General Concept: We joyfully celebrate the birth of Jesus in a world that longs for fullness.*

*Key Concept: (Middle and Older Elementary)*

**Jesus is the Word of God that has become "flesh" and dwelt among us.**

### **Exegesis of the Biblical References**

Psalm 91 is a hymn expressing the highest degree of trust in the Lord, the source of abiding assurance of protection even in the gravest of all crises and dangers one may face in life. This hymn is addressed to a worshipper who is entering the sanctuary of the Lord in Jerusalem. There in the sanctuary, the worshipper experiences the presence of the Lord as a steady fortress and refuge where she or he can seek sanctuary from whatever terror or destruction is threatening her or his very own existence. The sanctuary of the Lord becomes the most secure and peaceful dwelling place for all those who trust in the Lord. Those who have grown and been

nurtured in the shadow of God's sanctuary, those who have always been living in the joy of being inside the house of worship joining the community of believers in worshipping and serving God, will be the ones who will exude a distinct sense of peace and security in their life even in the midst of whatever crisis they may be facing. Their confrontation with the terrors of the night nor the deadly arrows that fly by day and other threats to their very existence as they try to live in faithful obedience to the will and mandate of the Lord will never intimidate them nor make them surrender nor compromise their faith and loyalty to the God that they confess as their only Lord and master. Their being always a part of the life and ministry of the church will certainly make a difference in the kind of life they will live, the kind of behavior they will manifest each day, the kind of relationship they will keep and nurture and the kind of values and concerns and advocacies they will uphold and fight for.

The text in John 1:14 declares in a very short but very profound language the truth about the coming of Jesus on Christmas day. Jesus is the Word of God that has become "flesh" and has dwelt among us. This is what John and the other disciples have beheld in their experience of encountering Jesus in his life and ministry. The "flesh" that God has indeed become is the full manifestation of the glory of the Son from the Father. Here lies the reality as well as mystery of the Incarnation: God took on the full identity of an ordinary human being and became identified as a true and ordinary human who dwelt among fellow humans right in a particular time and place in history. God became involved in the concrete affairs of ordinary human beings as a fellow human being, having his own family, enjoying the company of friends, or "barkada", enjoying being with people and at the same time, discerning well the things that are wrong and the things that need to be changed in his own society and the kind of people who he knew needed the priority attention of God. These are the people who are crying for healing, for restoration and the fullness of liberation. Jesus revealed the fullness of the nature of God as a God who loves people and who cares for people especially the downtrodden. This is the most ironic mystery and paradox of this revelation. Those who decided to follow Jesus as their Lord have truly discerned and beheld the truth that in him, in this very ordinary human being, who even suffered and died as an innocent victim of false accusations, is revealed the depth and meaning of the glory of what it means to be the Son of a loving God. Perhaps this is the reason why the gospel of Luke, in relating the story of the birth of Jesus, also disclosed one very significant information about this event: that the very first people to whom the good news of the birth of the son of God was revealed were the shepherds. They are people identified among the underclasses of Jewish society, those considered among the unlettered, uneducated and good only for being hired to take care of the sheep, those who have no real capacity to rise from poverty and the depravity of their situation, and have no power to question nor even change their fate at the moment. But it is the shepherds who would soon reveal the fullness of God's glory. They will share the good news about the son of God, the good news that hope finally has come, and that their life and lot is now about to be transformed by the fact that they themselves have become so empowered enough to bring and share this good news of hope to others. For people of their kind, truly, the coming of Jesus is something that is indeed worth celebrating in all its fullness.

### **Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users**

For the masses of humanity since time immemorial, there has been more sadness than joy on earth. There are many faces of sadness even as the cry of the suffering people has reached heaven. And so in the midst of a sorrowing world, God sent the world a bundle of joy—Jesus. It is part of the church's profound discernment to have pictured Jesus' humble birth as a joyous event: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come."

But perhaps the kind of joy that the present world feels about Christmas may not be the same kind of joy that the shepherds and the heavenly messengers felt. For the lowly shepherds, the announcement of the birth of the messiah meant an answer to their longings for relief from a life of poverty, laborious toil and humiliation. For hundreds of years, the people of Israel had longed for respite from endless wars brought upon the nation by imperial domination. Some had hoped that a heavenly messiah would descend from heaven to establish God's reign of justice, peace and prosperity. For those who saw no end to a life in misery, the news of the final arrival of the savior messiah was gospel, good news indeed.

In the contemporary world, the essence and message of Christmas may have been lost in the glitter of a secular and commercialized world. Even the church may have missed the point that the Nativity Scene that is being reenacted on Christmas Eve is actually a counterpoint to the holiday scene outside in the larger world. The humble scene of a new-born babe in a manger comes in sharp contrast to the crowd who are dressed in their best attires. It is important for worshipers to recover the original joy that the news of the messiah's birth brought: the joy of salvation, of relief and liberation. But, of course, only those who knew life below and in the periphery would be longing for salvation as shepherds did.

### I. Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, the learners are expected to:

1. Describe the joy of remembering the birth of Jesus
2. Explain that God's word became "flesh" in Jesus
3. Tell the importance of having Jesus dwell among us
4. Make a resolution to make Jesus the important character in the Christmas story because he came to make us whole
5. Show one's appreciation on the birth of Jesus

**II. Concept:** Jesus is the Word of God that has become "flesh" and dwelt among us.

**Materials:** The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), script on The Best Present of All (enclosed), materials for a manger scene diorama, paste, paper, scissors

### III. Learning Experiences

#### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Joyfully and warmly greet the children a Merry Christmas! Check the attendance. Welcome and introduce new comers, if there are any. Tell the children to give a "high five" to the person on their right, then on their left, and greet them with a joyous "Merry Christmas!"
2. Opening prayer: We greet you, Jesus, a happy birthday! We thank you for this day because you showed your great love for us by becoming human and living with us. You showed us how to love you and to love one another. Bless our Sunday School class so that all that we learn here will be useful to us every day. Amen.
3. Lead the children in singing Christmas hymns:  
"Joy to the World" / "O Magsaya"  
"O Come, All Ye Faithful"  
"Hark the Herald Angels Sing"
4. Teach the song "The Story of Jesus" (Children Praise God, 14)  
Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph  
In a manger in Bethlehem one cold and starry night.

And in the air the angels sing  
"A Savior is born tonight!  
Alleluia! Alleluia, a Savior is born tonight!"

**B. Getting Ready**

1. Remind the children about the loving / kind acts they said they would do as written in strips of paper in the last session.
2. Ask: Did you do what you wrote about on your strips of paper? Why or why not?
3. Point out to them that the most loving act that God did was to send God's only Son as a human being to the world to show acts of love and kindness and to save us from everything sinful.
4. Say: To show our love for God, we must love the people around us, especially those who are downtrodden. We must show acts of love and kindness at every opportunity we can.

**C. Learning Time**

1. Lead the class in the reading of the Scripture Lesson for the day: Luke 2:7-18 and John 1:14. The teacher may assign a verse to each student to read or the students may read responsively.
2. Provide a brief background / context of the verses they have just read by pointing out that:
  - a. Jesus came at a time when the people were being oppressed and they longed for a Savior. The Savior came not as a soldier or politician, but as a son of a humble carpenter and peasant. His birth was first announced to humble and simple shepherds. The birth of Jesus is more meaningful because it shows that God favors the lowly and those who have low status in society.
  - b. Jesus was the hope and joy that the people were long expecting. His birth was a joyous occasion because it meant their prayers were answered. It was good news indeed. Because Jesus came to us and dwelt among us, the people experienced a different kind of love, a love that is willing to sacrifice, a love that is all-encompassing and unconditional.

**D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time**

1. Ask the children whether Christmas time is a happy time for them. Why or why not? Let them share by having volunteers describe their best Christmas experience.
2. Ask them what the most important message of Christmas is for them, and also who for them is the most important character in the Christmas story? Why?

**E. Discovering the Biblical Truth**

1. Lead the children to the biblical truth that the birth of Jesus brings joy of salvation, of relief and of liberation especially to those who are oppressed, to those who are suffering and those who are in bondage (physically imprisoned, psychologically / emotionally dependent, bound to all forms of addiction including illnesses, etc.)
2. Ask the children to share their knowledge of how Jesus showed His love for others while He was on earth. How did He manifest this love to the oppressed, the suffering and the sick?
3. Say that this is what it means for the word of God to become "flesh" in Jesus. He dwelt or lived with us so we may know how it is to be loving human beings.

**F. Applying the Biblical Truth**

1. Help children to master the memory verse: John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh

and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

2. For ME: If the class is big, divide into two groups. Provide materials for a diorama. Let them construct the manger scene. Let them tell the story, from their own words, the birth of Jesus, using the manger scene as visual aid.  
For OE: Let the children role play the Story of Jesus' Birth using the script enclosed herewith. The teacher may assign the roles in the story or ask for volunteers. The parts may be read and acted out so there's no need to memorize.

#### G. Closing Worship

1. Let the children recite the memory verse.
2. Offering: As the offering is being collected, the song "Give Thanks" may be sung.
3. Prayer of Thanksgiving: Encourage children to pray by asking if someone can lead in the prayer. Otherwise, the teacher may lead in the prayer and ask the children to repeat after him/her.
3. Closing song: (Any Christmas song / hymn may be sung)  
"O Come, All Ye Faithful"  
"Happy Birthday, Jesus"  
"Many, Many Years Ago" (Children Praise God, 15)  
Many, many years ago, Jesus came, Jesus came,  
Just because He loves us so, Jesus came to earth.  
Many, many years ago, angels sang, angels sang  
To the shepherds down below, sang their song of joy
4. Closing prayer: (Suggested Prayer)  
Dear God, thank you, for sending your Son Jesus, to live with us and to show us your love. Teach us to be like him, to love you and others. As we celebrate Christmas, may Jesus be the most important person because He is the best gift that You ever gave to us. Amen.

#### SKIT: THE BEST PRESENT OF ALL

**Narrator (Boy):** A long time ago in a town called Nazareth, there lived a young woman called Mary and a young carpenter called Joseph. They loved each other very much and so they decided to get married. But before they could get married, an angel of the Lord appeared to Mary.

**Angel:** Don't be afraid, Mary. God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God.

**Mary:** I am a virgin. How can this be?

**Angel:** The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God.

**Mary:** I am the Lord's servant; may it happen to me as you have said.

**Narrator (Boy):** Not long after that, Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. By order of the Emperor, everyone must return to the place where

they were born to be registered there. Joseph was born in a place called Bethlehem in Judea. Joseph was worried because Mary was pregnant and Bethlehem was far away. But, they had to make the journey even if Mary was about to give birth.

**Narrator (Girl):** It took many days to reach Bethlehem. When they arrived, Mary was very tired. They needed to find somewhere to stay, but the town was crowded with many other travelers who came to be registered for the census. Every guestroom was full and they couldn't find a place to stay. There was no room for them to stay. And Mary was about to give birth.

**Narrator (Boy):** A housekeeper took pity on them, seeing that Mary was about to give birth and led them to a stable where he kept his animals. Mary and Joseph thanked him and were shown to the stable. During the night Mary gave birth to Jesus. She wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger full of hay.

**Narrator (Girl):** Nearby on a hillside overlooking the town some shepherds were watching over their sheep. Suddenly, a very bright light shone on them. An angel of the Lord appeared. They were terribly afraid but the angel said to them:

**Angel:** Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in Bethlehem, your Savior was born—Christ the Lord. You will find him wrapped in cloths lying in a manger.

**Narrator (Boy):** Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God.

**Narrator (Girl):** The shepherds were excited as they hurried off to find the manger. They found Mary and Joseph and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay. When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told everyone what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and were amazed.

**Narrator (Boy):** And all these centuries later we retell this wonderful story of when God came to us as a baby. We tell the stories of angels and shepherds, stables and mangers, Mary and Joseph. Although the message does not change, it continues to change hearts.

**Narrator (Girl):** We wish each and every one of you the peace and joy that Christmas brings. And we hope that this Christmas, you will receive in your hearts the best present of all, Jesus our Wonderful Savior.

Readers:

1. Narrators – Boy and Girl
2. Mary
3. Angel

Other Roles:

1. Shepherds
2. Joseph
3. Innkeeper
4. King Herod
5. Three Wise Men

**January 1, 2017**First Sunday after Christmas: **Defending Children, Symbols of a New Beginning***Old Testament: Isaiah 43:18-19*

18 Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

*New Testament: Matthew 2:1-16*

2In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." 9When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. The Escape to Egypt

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

The Massacre of the Infants

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

*General Concept:* **Upholding the rights and welfare of children makes a just and compassionate society now and in the future.**

*Key Concept: (Middle and Older Elementary)*

**God's gift of the child Jesus is God's redemptive and liberating will, the source of hope for all the children of God.**

## Exegesis of the Biblical References

Our Old Testament text in Isaiah 43:18-19 speaks of the prophet's prophecy of the new things that God is doing and is certain to be realized. It is something that can already be perceived in what is happening around. This is an announcement of a radical change of paradigm on the way God's ways and actions are to be perceived and understood by God's people. God is rapidly making a way in the desert wilderness of the people's maze of traditions and beliefs. The Israelites had a basic orientation

- of being so rooted in the memories of a saving past as in the Exodus event,
- of being so anchored with misplaced pride on the exclusive claims of the Sinai covenant,
- of being so deluded with the thought of being an exclusively chosen people of God,
- of making the false assumption that Israel is solely the recipient of God's redeeming and protecting grace and power to the exclusion of all others.

From this basic orientation, the prophet now calls the attention of his fellow exiles in Babylon to seriously re-examine such questionable faith assumptions. This is in light of events that just took place in their history.

Now they are a defeated, humiliated, completely dominated people, vanquished by another nation which conquered them in the name of another god. Their old assumptions, their reliance on the old traditions, their old faith understanding now become seriously questioned and undermined. Not a few could have been tempted to surrender and compromise even their faith convictions and just embrace the seemingly more advanced, more sophisticated culture, political and religious assumptions, practices and beliefs of their Babylonian conquerors. How can one assert the truth, power and claims of one's own beliefs if they are now living in the midst of a foreign culture whose religion and deities seem to have overpowered their own covenant God in Yahweh? Could Marduk be indeed more powerful than our God Yahweh? If this is not true, then why did Yahweh allow their own downfall as a chosen people? Why did God allow the temple and their beloved holy city of Jerusalem to be destroyed and burned? Why did our covenant God allow us, the religious and political leaders of our land to be thrown into a most humiliating and degrading exile and be left fending for ourselves, completely disoriented, confused, in so much despair in a land which is not our home? Why does the way of Yahweh appear so hidden and our basic covenant rights seemingly completely disregarded by this God? (cf. Is. 40:27)

Here, the prophet proclaims one very decisive turning point in the understanding of their faith. God remains actively working but in completely new ways towards the eventual renewal and restoration of Yahweh's people. No need to pin our hopes on the old assumptions and old paradigms. The Lord now is making a way through otherwise completely surprising and even shocking new means, where the impossible will now become so possible, where the unrealizable will soon be fulfilled. This is where there will be a turning upside down of the most cherished and preserved of the faith traditions of the people. This is where the mystery of the redeeming power of God is to be fully revealed in the very near future. This is what will constitute the completely shocking good news that the Gospel will soon be proclaiming.

In the New Testament text in Matthew 2:1-16, it turns out that the coming of this shocking good news will not be a smooth, resistance-free process. The more this comes as a shock because right in this story in Matthew, this Good News is revealed first to gentile peoples, those who had not really confessed belief in the God of Israel. They are the wise men from the East. They are practitioners more of the religion connected with the stars, concerned more with reading and discerning the future through the movements of heavenly bodies. In this particular occasion however, they discerned something more vital, something more historically significant

than they could ever imagine. They just discerned from the heavens a sign of the new thing that God is doing in the history of Yahweh's people. The promised new thing now comes in the form of a baby born in the humblest and most deprived of conditions; not in and through any claims to power and connection to royal assumptions and positions. The promised new thing is just a baby as fully discerned by an unbelieving group of astrologers. The gift of discernment is never a monopoly of those who claim to be God's people. Others who do not share such claim can also be recipients of an even more profound discernment of liberating truth, not just from scripture, but also from historical and natural phenomena around them. There are times they can be even more sensitive and serious thinkers about life and faith than those who profess such faith.

But then, this new thing as discerned by non-believers immediately created a sense of alarm and panic on the part of those who have power and vested interests to protect. Those who benefit so much from the maintenance and preservation of highly unjust and oppressive conditions of those they dominate and control. There will always be Herods who will undertake all means to stop and prevent the coming of the new even to the extent of using deception and employing their own paid wise men to make counter-discernments to detect the location or the birth of the new. There will always be resistance from those who are threatened by the dawning of the new. But the story is so clear in what is being proclaimed. The coming of the new that will serve as liberating good news for the oppressed can never be stopped nor be suppressed at all. The Herods even of our time may even employ the most violent means of repressing and silencing the possible sources of new hope like newly born babies. But God's ways, acting according to the redemptive and liberating will of this God, can never be stopped by any human scheme. This is the source of the springs of hope of an otherwise hopeless people. An otherwise seemingly innocent-looking powerless baby actually becomes the revelation of God's real power and grace. To defend and protect the life and future of babies and all children is to protect and ensure the coming of the new, purely a gift of God.

### **Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users**

Children are symbols of the future. And what the world does to the children foretells the world's future. A society that is kind to children, that gives them space to play and grow, that invests in schools that teaches them to "do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with their God" (Micah 6:8), builds a world that is safe, friendly, hospitable, generous and where goodwill fills the air. The world builds a future world worthy of human habitation by defending its children from harm and abuse now.

The prophetic image of "the child shall lead the way" expresses this truth. Children indeed are leading the way to a free and bright future. Jesus' words, that unless people become like children they cannot enter the kingdom of God, say it all. Since the kingdom points to a future prepared by God, Jesus' message is that making a child-friendly society today paves the way to the realization of a bright future for all.

### **I. Objectives:**

At the end of the lesson, the learners are expected to:

1. Tell how Jesus is used by God to redeem and liberate God's people
2. Relate the birth of Jesus to the hope of humankind for its future
3. List ways by which children are protected
4. Demonstrate and express one's commitment to protect children

- II. Concept:** God's gift of the child Jesus is God's redemptive and liberating will, the source of hope for all the children of God.

**Materials:** The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), The Holy Bible, offering plate/ basket, scissors, slips of paper or meta cards, pentel pens, masking tape, bond paper, crayons or colored pentel pens.

### III. Learning Experiences

#### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Joyfully and warmly greet the children a Happy New Year! Check the attendance. Welcome and introduce new comers, if there are any.
2. Lead the children in singing welcome / praise songs:  
"There's a Welcome Here"  
"It's a Great Thing to Praise the Lord"  
"This is the Day"  
"Jesus Loves the Little Children"
3. Opening prayer: Teach the children another way of posing for a prayer. Teach them to raise their hands with open palms. "We praise and thank You, dear God, for your loving kindness to us in the past year. We praise and thank You for a new and blessed year. May You continue to guide and lead us in Your loving ways. Bless our Sunday School so that we may learn new lessons today. Amen."

#### B. Getting Ready

Prepare the children by letting them share what makes them feel afraid or unsafe in the home, school, community (church, barangay, park, beach, mall, etc.). Let them write their fears in phrases on slips of paper or meta cards and post them on the board. Organize the responses according to location (home, school, community, etc.). Summarize.

#### C. Learning Time

1. Lead the class in the reading of the Scripture Lesson for the day: Matthew 2:1-16. The scriptures may be read responsively. Allow the children to read the verses silently, for more comprehension.
2. Provide a brief background / context of the verses they have just read by pointing out that:
  - a. Even during the time of Jesus, there were those who harmed children, including King Herod. Ask them to relate what King Herod said to the wise men. Let them tell what King Herod did to all the children two years old and below, when the wise men did not obey him.
  - b. The wise men wanted to protect Jesus. Ask them how they did this.
  - c. God protected Jesus, too. Ask the children how God did this. What did Joseph and Mary do, to protect Jesus, as instructed by God?

#### D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

1. Go back to the children's list of fears. Point out to them that their fears can be overcome or prevented. First ask them how they can be protected and be safe. Make a list. Assure them that there are people who provide for their safety and protection. Give examples:  
At home:
  - o Parents see to it that the house is secure, clean and sanitary

- Parents see to it that the house is maintained and repaired when necessary to avoid accidents and mishaps
- Dangerous items such as gas tanks, matches, chemicals are out of reach of children and checked regularly.
- Children are taught not to talk to or go with strangers.

In school:

- Teachers make sure that children do not go out of the school campus unaccompanied.
- The school administration will designate safe places to buy food
- The school is implementing an Anti-Bullying Policy

In the community:

- Rivers, streams, ponds or lakes are monitored or assigned with watchers and children are not allowed to go near them without adult supervision
  - There is police or tanod visible in the barangay
  - Children are not allowed to play in the streets
  - Dogs, pigs and other animals are not allowed on the streets. Stray animals are caught and restrained.
2. Ask the children if they are aware of these safety procedures and other protection measures in their home, school and community. How can they help each other be safe and protected? Emphasize that God loves them and wants them to be safe.

#### *E. Discovering the Biblical Truth*

Lead the children to believe in the Biblical truth that God sent God's Son Jesus so we could be safe from all that is sinful. Jesus is God's instrument to redeem and liberate God's people. Believing in Jesus and following His ways will ensure redemption and liberation from everything that bounds us, including physical, mental, psychological and spiritual harm and danger.

#### *F. Applying the Biblical Truth*

1. Help children to master the memory verse: Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."
2. For ME: Let the children color a page with the wise men or a page with Mary, Joseph and Jesus fleeing to Egypt, with the caption "The Flight to Egypt".  
For OE: Let children make child protection posters, with captions like: "Protect the Children", "God Loves the Children", "Keep Children Safe", "Make the World Safe for Kids", etc. The children can make their own captions, too.

#### *G. Closing Worship*

1. Let the children recite the memory verse.
2. Offering: As the offering is being collected, the song "Give Thanks" may be sung.
3. Prayer of Thanksgiving: Encourage children to pray by asking if someone can lead in the prayer. Otherwise, the teacher may lead in the prayer and ask the children to repeat after him/her.
3. Closing song: "God, We Do Thank You" (Children Praise God, 158)  
God, we do thank you for our lives,  
For each good year which comes and goes  
For all the blessings we receive  
That give us joy as each day we live
4. Closing prayer: (Suggested Prayer)  
Dear God, thank you for keeping us safe just as you kept Jesus safe from King Herod. Thank you for loving us and sending your Son Jesus to save us from all that

is sinful. Teach us to follow and obey you in every way so that we will be safe from temptations and other things that endanger us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

