

**Scriptures**

1 Samuel 16:1-13

John 9:1-11

# Eyes Open to Jesus

## session essentials

**Jesus heals our spiritual blindness.**

- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus heals a man born blind. We tell this story, but focus on God's choice of David the shepherd boy who will be King of God's people.
- ◆ Today's story is one of several biblical stories that affirm the importance of children in God's sight.
- ◆ Today's session explores the meaning of the word *anoint* both in today's Old Testament story and in today's gospel.

**Core Session**

- ◆ Getting Started
- ◆ Old Testament Story: Who Will Be King? (*small bowl of olive oil*)
- ◆ Story-Review Game
- ◆ Praying Together

**Enrichment**

- ◆ Welcome the Good News
- ◆ Singing Together
- ◆ Creative Drama (*optional: collection of sheets, towels, scarves, etc.*)
- ◆ Anointing Activity (*olive oil, bowl, towel*)
- ◆ Story-Review Game
- ◆ Book of Psalms
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

**Helps for Leaders**

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Gospel of John

## ✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

David is a familiar figure to many primary children. Begin by inviting children to share any stories about David that they know. As necessary, explain that David was a shepherd boy, who looked after his family's sheep. (Attached to this document, You'll find a Psalm 23 activity poster with plenty of information about shepherds in Bible times. David was the boy who used a slingshot to save his people from the giant Goliath. He loved to play the harp and sing to God.

## ✓ Old Testament Story (5-10 minutes)

### Who Will Be King?

*Story Focus: Use a small bowl of olive oil or baby oil as a focus for the story. When you reach the moment when Samuel anoints David, touch your fingers to the oil. If time allows, precede this story with the Anointing Activity on page 3.*

Once God wanted a king to take good care of God's people. One day God spoke to the prophet Samuel, who listened carefully to God. "Samuel," said God, "Go to Bethlehem. I have chosen someone there to be king, and you will anoint my king with oil."

Samuel took oil and traveled to Bethlehem. God led him to the house of Jesse. "Come and worship God with me," Samuel said to Jesse. "Bring your sons with you." Jesse brought his sons to Samuel. They were strong, handsome, kingly men; not just one son, or two sons, or even three sons. Seven sons Samuel counted!

Samuel prayed, "Lord, help me! How do I tell which son I should anoint?" Samuel went to the first son, a tall, handsome man.

"Not this one," said God. "He is not handsome inside—and that's what counts with me." Samuel walked to the second son. "I have not chosen this son either," said God. And so it went for the third son, the fourth son, the fifth, the sixth and the seventh. "None of these will I choose as king," said God.

Samuel asked Jesse, "Have you any other sons?"

"Yes, one more," said Jesse. "He's taking care of the sheep. But what do you want with him? He's just a boy!"

"Bring him here," said Samuel.

So Jesse sent for his youngest son, a boy named David. When David came into the house, God said, "This is the one! I see his heart, and I know that he is the king who will take care of my people. Anoint him, Samuel!"

Right there Samuel anointed David with olive oil. And at that moment, the Spirit of God entered David. "God is with me!" cried David. "I will take care of all God's people!"

## ✓ Story-Review Game (10-20 minutes)

Children play Eighth-Child Tag, a variation of Tag based on today's story. (If your space doesn't allow for Tag, use the Creative Drama activity on p. 3 instead.) Ask a volunteer to play *Samuel*. When *Samuel* tags a child, he or she calls a number, beginning with "One!" The child tagged answers, "Not me!" and continues running. Only when *Samuel* has tagged the eighth child and called out, "Eight!" does this child respond, "I'm the new king!"

## ✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

On the board or newsprint, draw the outline of a large cross. Say:

- ◆ During Lent we will use a cross shape to help us pray.
- ◆ Today we remember David, who took care of God's family. Who else belongs to God's family?
- ◆ On the cross, draw or write someone who belongs to God's family.

Invite children to offer thanks to God for the people listed. Close by praying:

- ◆ God, thank you for King David and for each member of your family, especially (*names of Jesus and the children in the group*). Amen.

**Note:** If you use *At Home with the Good News*, distribute this week's paper to the children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.

## Welcome the Good News

(5-10 minutes)

Today's *Welcome the Good News* explores the Old Testament story of David. On page 1 You'll find an illustrated version of today's story.

On page 2 You'll find the scripture-skills activity Welcome God's Word. Invite children to complete the activity together. On page 2 children will also find a biblical scavenger hunt, which they can complete in pairs or small groups, and With Your Family, an activity they can lead at home or practice in the group.

## Singing Together

(5-10 minutes)

From *Singing the Good News*, sing together:

- ◆ "David Was a Shepherd Boy" (p. 36 of the songbook)

**Note:** To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on *Singing the Good News*.

## Creative Drama

(10-20 minutes)

Invite the children to act out today's story. Begin by asking:

- ◆ What do you think are the most important things that happened in today's story?

List children's answers on a board or newsprint; for example:

- ◆ God tells Samuel to find a king.
- ◆ Samuel anoints David.

Invite children to base their drama on events listed. If you have a small group, invite children to take more than one part each. Encourage the children to make their own simple costumes from the sheets, towels and other cloths. If children use real oil for the anointing, supervise carefully to prevent clothes from getting stained.

## Anointing Activity

(10-15 minutes)

Children explore the meaning of the word *anoint*.

Sit with the children in a circle. Pour a small amount of olive oil into a deep bowl. Pass the bowl, together with a towel around the circle. Invite children to sniff the oil, rub a little oil between two fingers, and, if you are using olive oil *only*, taste the oil.

Help the children remember to use the towel to wipe up any excess oil from fingers or mouths; oil stains clothes readily. Discuss:

- ◆ What does oil feel like? smell like? taste like?
- ◆ When do we use oil? (*Children might recall such examples as cooking, making salads, putting oil on a baby, etc. Use Bigot's Girl Pours Oil into a Lamp, attached to this document, to show children another use of oil: bringing light.*)

Say:

- ◆ We also use oil to anoint people.
- ◆ The word *anoint* means to rub or smear oil. When we anoint someone, we rub oil on that person, often on the person's head.
- ◆ In Bible stories, the person who is anointed is given special power from God.
- ◆ (*Include this sentence only if it represents the custom of your church.*) When someone is baptized in our church, we anoint that person with oil to show the special power he or she has been given by God.
- ◆ Let's try anointing each other today.

Show the children how to dip a finger in the oil and rub it gently on someone's forehead. You might have the children sit in a circle, each child anointing his or her neighbor on the left.

## □ Story-Review Game (10-15 minutes)

Children practice drawing stars of David, then use these shapes to play a story-review game. Invite third graders to use their Bibles to find the answers for today's Bible Skills activity.

Ask for a volunteer to draw a star of David—a six-pointed star formed from one triangle placed onto another—on the chalkboard, whiteboard or newsprint. If necessary, show how to make one yourself. Invite the other children to try drawing these stars, too.

Then challenge the children to a story-review game.

*Directions to the children:*

- ◆ I will ask you a story-review question.
- ◆ If you answer the question correctly, you can draw the first line of a star of David.
- ◆ When you answer six questions correctly, you will have an entire star of David.
- ◆ Work together to answer the questions. (Help third graders find 1 Samuel 16:1-13. These children use Bibles to answer the questions.)
- ◆ See if you can draw *two* stars of David!

*Story-review questions:*

- ◆ Who was the prophet in today's story? (*Samuel*)
- ◆ Why did God want a king? (*to take care of God's people*)
- ◆ Where did God tell Samuel to go to find a new king? (*Bethlehem*)
- ◆ What did God want Samuel to do to the new king? (*Anoint him with oil.*)
- ◆ To whose house did Samuel go? (*Jesse's house*)
- ◆ How many sons did Jesse bring to Samuel? (*Children might answer seven or eight; accept either answer.*)
- ◆ What did the sons of Jesse look like? (*strong, handsome or kingly*)
- ◆ Did God choose the first son of Jesse? (*No; if children are having trouble getting right answers, repeat this question for the second son, the third son, etc.*)
- ◆ Where was the eighth son of Jesse? (*taking care of the sheep*)
- ◆ What was the name of the eighth son of Jesse? (*David*)
- ◆ Who did God choose as king? (*David*)
- ◆ Who anointed David with oil? (*Samuel*)

## □ Book of Psalms (10-20 minutes)

Throughout Lent and Easter, we explore psalm verses by making an oversized "book" of posters based on verses relevant to the day's story or theme. In today's session, we share with children a psalm verse based on the scriptural and liturgical practice of anointing.

Invite children to recall how oil was used in today's story about David. Recall, too, that Jesus anointed the blind man in today's gospel story—but he used mud, not oil. What happened to David when he was anointed? What happened to the blind man? Read aloud to children these words from verse five of Psalm 23 (NRSV): *You anoint my head with oil.*

Write the verse in the center of a sheet of poster board. Ask children to fill the poster with words and drawings that show scenes from today's story. Save this poster; you will turn it into a book in the session for Trinity Sunday.

## INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
  - A printable version of today's *Gospel Story: I Can See!*, drawn from **John 9:1-11**.
  - A printable version of today's *Old Testament Story: Who Will Be King?*
  - A helpful article for leaders looking at *Children and the Lectionary*.
  - A family paper, *At Home with the Good News*, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.
- ◆ Open your Spring-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Spring-A's *Models of the Faith*.
  - A printable article for leaders and/or families exploring traditional *Lenten Disciplines* in the lives of believers.
  - A printable article for leaders examining *Using the Arts to Bring Different Age Groups Together*.
  - The *Introduction for Primary* for **Living the Good News**.

## More about Today's Scriptures

In today's readings, we explore another image of Jesus: light for the world, dispelling spiritual darkness. In the first reading, Samuel sees beyond outward appearances to choose the least likely son of Jesse as king. Paul explains to the Ephesians that the Christian's life must be characterized by the light of holiness. In today's gospel, a blind man gains sight and worships Jesus.

### 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Prior to today's reading, God had already rejected Saul as king because of his disobedience and had indicated that another had been chosen. In grief and fear, Samuel refuses to see Saul again.

Unlike Saul, Samuel waits for God's instructions and follows them precisely. These instructions seem to run contrary even to what Samuel might have expected. God teaches him that human wisdom does not penetrate the depths that God's wisdom does.

Public acknowledgment of David's anointing would come only after years of trouble and persecution. The story, however, indicates that, despite all the scheming of David's rise to power, God had raised him up and made his victories possible. David, unlike his predecessor, Saul, had found the secret of life: doing God's will.

### Ephesians 5:8-14

Today's reading comes from a section urging members of the Christian community to live out the reality of their new baptismal life, imitating God as known to them through Christ—forgiving, loving and offering themselves. Gentile converts may have believed that physical actions were irrelevant to spiritual existence. Paul affirms that both words and deeds give evidence of new life.

The old and the new ways of life are contrasted as “once...darkness, now...light” (v. 8). The baptized receive enlightenment and now live as light to others.

### John 9:1-41

John uses a healing story as a commentary on 8:12, an enactment of the triumph of light over darkness. The belief in a causal relationship between sin and suffering was widespread, but Jesus turns the attention from cause to purpose—the manifestation of God's works through Jesus' ministry.

The interrogations that the healed man and his parents undergo become, in effect, a trial of Jesus. The increasing insight of the man is contrasted with the hardening blindness of the Pharisees. The man, who is not afraid to confess his ignorance, progresses from seeing Jesus as a man to seeing him as a prophet, then asserting that Jesus must be from God, and finally worshipping him as the Son of Man, through whom God would usher in the final era of judgment and salvation (v. 39).

The Pharisees are at first divided. Some are open but others, by applying the test of Deuteronomy 13:1-5, see Jesus as a sabbath-breaker, either for healing a non-life-threatening illness and/or for kneading the clay and anointing on the sabbath.

For the man born blind, however, his healing is more than sight regained. It is a new creation, a gift of light in order to see Jesus and believe in him.

## Reflection

“One thing I do know,” says the blind man (John 9:25). According to William Countryman, “This moment of enlightenment is the great turning point of John's Gospel” (*The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 74).

Why are five words so pivotal? Consider the source: because of his blindness since birth, the man has not read the *Torah*, and doesn't know the laws in which the authorities try to entangle him. He draws purely and simply from his own dramatic experience. As Countryman says, “He looks to Jesus now as the one reliable point of access between God and humanity, as the touchstone of everything in human life” (p. 74).



Then he trusts Jesus completely. The title *Son of Man* (John 9:35) may be meaningless, but he's so indebted to Jesus he'll believe anything he says, and does him reverence.

In contrast, the Pharisees desperately cling to the past, boasting, "we are disciples of Moses" (John 9:28). Their tenacious clinging to tradition prevents them from seeing God's splendid action in the present.

And we? Are we so caught up in custom that we fail to see the stunning realities of our own lives? What is the "one thing"—the experience of God—on which we base our belief?

## The World of the Bible

### The Gospel of John

During Lent this year, many of the gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of John. The fourth gospel is much different in tone and style from the other three, which, because of their interdependence, present a somewhat similar account of Jesus' life and teaching. John's gospel seems to be based on an independent source of traditions about Jesus. In contrast to the other gospels, John reports no parables or exorcisms and puts a greater emphasis on Jesus' divinity.

Authorship in biblical times was not limited to actually writing down the text. Often a designated author was simply the authority for the book, the source of the teachings and memories. According to tradition, the authorship of the fourth gospel is attributed to the apostle John, son of Zebedee. However most scholars today find this unlikely and consider that the author was not one of the twelve but may have been one of the wider group of disciples. He is idealized as the mysterious "beloved disciple" figure that appears in the gospel story.

The Gospel of John is carefully organized and shows deep theological reflection both on the significance of the things Jesus said and did and on who Jesus was—the incarnate revelation of God. He is "Word made flesh" (John 1:14) and Son of God who has been sent for our salvation. More than any other gospel, John stresses the parent/child relationship of God and Jesus.

John portrays Jesus both as fully human (he became tired and thirsty, wept, suffered and died), and as the Christ in whom dwelt the fullness of God. John often uses the phrase "eternal life" where the other gospels use the kingdom of God. Life eternal has burst into human life in the person of Christ Jesus.

John's gospel reflects a movement away from eager anticipation of the imminent return of Christ toward a more spiritual understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the world. Later in the 2nd century, some heretics appealed to John's gospel to support their beliefs about a spiritual life seemingly unrelated to flesh-and-blood reality.

However, there is little evidence that John's words were meant to have such a connotation. John's language, especially the images of light and darkness so central to John's development, has close parallels to the language in scrolls found at Qumran, dated before 68 CE.

John states that his purpose for writing the gospel is to strengthen the faith of the believer and so lead to full life with God:

"These [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).