

Young Apprentices

A RESOURCE FOR THE OCIA

CATECHUMENATE SESSION

Fourth Sunday of Advent • Year A • December 21, 2025

Catechist Preparation

Scripture

FIRST READING—ISAIAH 7:10-14

Isaiah the prophet speaks God's message to the king. As a sign from God of his fidelity, a virgin shall conceive, bear a son, and name him Emmanuel.

SECOND READING—ROMANS 1:1-7

Saint Paul reminds the community that God's love gathers us into his household. We belong to God through the saving action of Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL—MATTHEW 1:18-24

An angel bears God's message to Joseph. Mary, his betrothed, will conceive through the Holy Spirit. Emmanuel shall be manifested in that holy birth.

Church Teaching: A Special Birth

The Church has confessed from its earliest days that Jesus' Incarnation occurred through a virgin birth. The Church's teaching on virgin birth focuses more on Christ than Mary, and on the Salvation that comes solely through him.

Great reverence has been attached to the teaching on the virgin birth of Jesus. Theologians, commentators, and the voices of the faithful echo the insights of Sacred Tradition and Scripture in acclaiming and honoring the memory of the ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and our mother too.

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 496, 498

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: Chapter 12, especially pages 143–146

Our Catholic Heritage, Levels I and II: pages 40–41, 145 (Jesus Christ)

Dismissal Session

(Approximately 20 minutes)

Set the space with chairs in a circle. On a small table, place a purple cloth, an open Bible or Lectionary, and an Advent wreath. If possible, also include an empty Christmas crèche.

Discover

1. Gather the group around the prayer table. Light the four candles on the Advent wreath, and sing an Advent refrain.
2. Invite the children to share their observations about the church's environment compared to their home environment by asking the following or similar questions:

How are the church and your home decorated differently? Why?

How are the church and your home decorated the same? Why?

Thinking about our prayer table, the church, and your home, what are they telling us about the upcoming celebration of Christmas? (Responses will vary.)

Deepen

1. Sing the Gospel Acclamation sung at your parish, and proclaim today's Gospel, Matthew 1:18-24.
2. Invite volunteers to retell the story in their own words.
3. After the children have returned to their seats, continue a discussion, highlighting the following points:
 - The role of Joseph in the birth of Jesus
 - The importance of signs and dreams
 - The meaning of the name *Emmanuel*
 - Today, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, is the last Sunday of Advent. We are very near the celebration of Christmas.

Pray

Invite the children to quiet themselves and to echo you in praying, “Come, Lord Jesus” several times. Conclude by singing the refrain of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

Extended Catechesis Session

(Approximately 45 to 60 minutes)

Supplies

In addition to the prayer table setup, you will need copies of the participant handout, a flip chart or whiteboard, and markers.

Sunday Word

Isaiah 7:10-14

Psalms 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24

Welcome

1. Welcome everyone and invite one or two children to share some of the key points from the **Dismissal Session**.
2. Invite the group to echo you in praying, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Conclude by singing the refrain of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

Invite

1. Brainstorm a list of signs and symbols that are part of everyday life. Write the children’s responses on the flip chart or whiteboard. As volunteers name signs and symbols, take time to discuss how and where the signs and symbols are used, and their meanings.
2. Gather the group around the prayer table, sing the Gospel Acclamation sung at your parish, and proclaim the Gospel, Matthew 1:18-24.
3. Invite the children to return to their seats, and discuss the reading, highlighting the following:
 - The angel’s message not to be afraid (which came to Joseph in a dream)

- The importance of dreams and angels in the Bible (as messages and messengers from God)
- Joseph’s willingness to listen and act as the angel had requested

4. Conclude by asking the children, “If you were Joseph, what would you do? Why?”

Teach

1. Introduce today’s session focus, “A Special Birth,” by discussing the following:
 - Mary’s role as the Mother of God; how with her “yes” to the angel Gabriel, God came to earth as an infant in Bethlehem
 - The Church’s teaching on the mystery of Jesus’ birth. Jesus has only one Father: God. Therefore, Jesus is God. He is also human; Mary, his mother, is human. Jesus is both God and man.
 - Joseph is the foster father of Jesus.
 - Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus: the Incarnation. Jesus, the Son of God, becomes human.
2. Read and discuss the **Key Teachings** and **Faith Word** from the participant handout.

Challenge

1. Remind the group that when we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating the coming of Christ as an infant. We are celebrating God’s greatest gift—his great love for us—the Son of God coming to Earth. We give presents to others as a sign of our love for them.
2. As you give and receive gifts this Christmas, remember that each gift is a sign of love. Take the time to say thank you to those who give you gifts, and to say thank you to God for the greatest gift of all.

Pray

Sing the refrain of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and pray the prayer on the front of the participant handout.