



WORSHIP AND DRAMA GUIDE

Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus Worship and Drama Guide

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Printed in United States of America
Cover design: Reuben Graham
Cover photo: Thinkstock
Writer: Mark Diller Harder, Project Director: Mary Ann Weber, Designer: Reuben Graham

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**Growing Up
Catholic**
A ministry of The Pastoral Center

INTRODUCTION

Jesus surprised the people he met! People in the temple were amazed by the conversations and questions they had with a boy named Jesus. Hungry people in a crowd had more than enough food to eat when Jesus provided plenty of food. Two travelers were sad that Jesus died, but then they were surprised when Jesus started walking alongside them! With each surprise, people discovered more about Jesus.

Are you ready to be surprised by Jesus? Are you ready to ask questions and discover more about him? Then come along on the journey, open your eyes, and see what you will find!

Each Worship time includes:

- **Gathering**—children enter worship by making connections between their lives and the Bible story.
- **Worshipping**—music, a call to worship, Bible memory, and a drama of the Bible story.
- **Responding**—prayer and an offering project.
- **Sending**—parting words and a sending blessing.

You are privileged to work with children. Encourage them to develop healthy relationships with each other. Pray that each child will learn and grow through the daily worship experience.

OUTLINE

Each session includes the Bible background, faith focus, and Bible memory passage. Spend time with them to understand the focus of the session. This information is also included in the other leader guides so that the activities will reflect the stories and themes presented during the Worship session.

LEADERS FOR WORSHIP

Several adult leaders are needed for the Worship time:

- **Worship leader**—to lead the children in worship.
- **Music leader**—to choose songs and lead singing.
- **Drama leader**—to find people to play parts and coordinate the drama, including props.
- **Bible memory leader**—to introduce the Bible memory passage and guide children in learning portions of it each day.

Depending on who is available and their individual skills, some of these leadership roles may be combined.

MUSIC

VBS music is available on the *Surprise!* CD. Children may sing along with some of the songs. Others can be used as listening pieces or music to play during worship and at other times. Music leaders will want to consider the VBS songs, but also choose songs that are familiar to the group and easy for the group to learn and sing together. You may want to gather a music group to lead songs.

When leading music, consider these suggestions:

- Sing songs from the CD.
- Sing other songs familiar to the group that go along with the theme.
- Listen quietly to the CD.
- Incorporate movement along with music.
- Have children play rhythm or other instruments.
- Sing songs used regularly in Mass.
- Chant song lyrics rather than singing them.

BIBLE MEMORY

One Bible memory passage is featured throughout the week:

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

The text is from the New Revised Standard Version. You may use a preferred translation.

(Bible memory continues on the following page.)

There are many fun ways to memorize Scripture. Use these suggestions or your own ideas to make Bible memory fun and easy.

- **Word Scramble:** Create cards with the words of the passage, one word per card. Hand out the cards in no particular order, and then invite children to stand in line with the passage unscrambled. If there are enough children, divide into teams, with each team having a set of words. Which team can unscramble first?
- **Missing Words:** Create cards with the words of the passage, one word per card. Attach them to the wall or a poster board in their correct order. Invite children, one at a time, to remove a word. After a word is removed, repeat the entire passage until all of the cards are gone. Or, write the passage on a whiteboard and invite children to erase one word at a time.
- **Action Words:** Invite children to suggest actions for key words. Say the passage together using the actions. This can be done in one large group, or in smaller groups with adults helping.
- **March in Place:** Say the passage while marching in place, one word per step. This gets tricky when words have more than one syllable! Try doing different actions, such as hopping on one foot, raising arms into the air, or tapping knees.
- **Balloon Toss:** Blow up a balloon and knot it, and then have children stand in a circle. Invite children to tap the balloon, with everyone saying a word of the passage each time the balloon is tapped. Keep it in the air. If the balloon falls to the floor, begin the passage again until the whole thing is said without the balloon falling.
- **Ball Toss:** Have children stand in a circle and give one of them a ball. Before gently throwing the ball to another child, the one holding the ball needs to say the next word of the passage. Invite other children to help if one child is unable to recall a word.
- **Musical Verses:** Hand out rhythm instruments and invite children to create sounds as they chant the passage together.
- **What Is It?:** Divide into small groups and give one piece of paper and several crayons to each group. Invite them to illustrate key words of the passage. Display the illustrations around the room.



OFFERING PROJECT

We have teamed up with Catholic Charities USA, the official domestic relief agency of the U.S. Catholic Church, to include an offering project suggestion. You may alternatively or in addition choose to promote another service organization.

To collect the offering, place a big basket on a stool or table at the entrance to the room, and invite children to place their offering in the basket as they enter for worship each day. Near the end of the worship time, a leader will take the basket to the front of the room and make connections to the day's theme. The basket will then be raised as the leader says a simple prayer: *Bless these gifts, O God*. This ritual is similar to the one Jesus used to break and share bread in the stories presented on both Day 3 and Day 5.

The offering basket will be used during the drama in Day 3 to gather the leftover loaves and fish.

A Message from Catholic Charities USA

Over the last 10 years, the Catholic Charities ministry has helped more than 6.5 million people affected by all kinds of disasters: floods, hurricanes, mudslides, tornadoes, ice storms, droughts, wildfires, explosions, violence, and environmental damage. But the need has only increased. Now, more than ever, we need to support our brothers and sisters through these challenges.

CCUSA provides training in disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. In particular, agencies anticipate and respond to the elevated risks and challenges of vulnerable populations impacted by disasters. With a national reach through a local presence, Catholic Charities helps people through both the immediate and the long-term process of recovery and restoration.

What Can Our Vacation Bible School Do?

1. Pray. Pray for health and well-being of those impacted by disasters, as well as those who are working hard to help them. You may choose to use or adapt one of the prayers found at <http://bit.ly/disaster-prayers> and <http://bit.ly/ccusa-disaster-prayer>.

2. Inform teachers, children, and parents. The more you learn about disaster relief, the more you'll understand how to help. Many of us are not aware of the impact natural disasters on the poorest of the poor and in parts of the U.S. far from the mainland (e.g. the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico). Learn more at <http://bit.ly/ccusa-disasters> and elsewhere.

3. Donate. One of the best ways to help is through donating to accredited nonprofit organizations that are responding to the need. Learn how to donate at CatholicCharitiesUSA.org.

4. Advocate. Speak out to make sure our government is using our resources wisely to help those in need. For example, see: <http://bit.ly/ccusa-advocacy>.

5. Use Social Media. Follow and retweet @CCharitiesUSA on Twitter for the latest updates and spread the word about the need to your friends and family.

Offering visuals

Plan a visual way to recognize the amount of money contributed for the project. Because bread is featured in two of the VBS stories, use a basket and loaves of bread or rolls as the offering visual. Place the bread or rolls into the basket depending on how much money is contributed. For example, one loaf or roll could indicate \$5 or \$10. The basket and bread or rolls could be real, or created from cardboard cutouts and hung on the wall. Review the amount each day and be sure to thank children for their generosity!

Also consider posting a large map (preferably one including the Caribbean) to highlight where disasters have taken place in the last year or two. You could position color coded stickers for different types, perhaps adding some each day as you tell the group about them. For lists by year, see: <http://bit.ly/2017-disasters>.

PRIMARY CHILDREN

Primary children are both endearing and challenging, and often open and affectionate. They may enjoy doing things on their own one minute, but want the leader's attention and guidance the next. Projects completed independently, though imperfect, are more satisfying than those completed by the leader.

Primary children think mainly about themselves and need encouragement to consider others and their needs. Sharing is hard for them, but repeated intervention is effective. Always acknowledge the children's feelings, even while correcting inappropriate actions. If you treat children with respect you will have encouraged positive behavior because primary children look up to their leaders and try to emulate them.

Primary children have lots of ideas and want to share them. They need space to express themselves and feel they are contributing to the group.

MIDDLER CHILDREN

At this age, children are becoming less self-centered and are able to understand another's point of view. They are big on fairness and rules, and will quickly tell you when something is unfair. Clearly communicate your expectations about group behavior. Follow through on your expectations. When working on a new skill or project, middler children show amazing focus and determination. They take criticism seriously, so try to frame comments in a positive way. Middlers tend to have best friends and can exclude others. Peers are important to them. While some still want to please their leaders, others are beginning to challenge authority. Model respect in your words and actions.

Children at this age show great developmental differences (physical, intellectual, psychological, social, and spiritual). Be aware of these differences and provide opportunities for everyone to contribute as they are comfortable. For example, reading abilities can range greatly. Be sensitive to any child's reluctance to read aloud. Many children are eager to read and comfortable doing it, while others find it difficult or embarrassing.

Middler children are full of energy and enthusiasm. Their bodies are growing and need physical activity. Whenever possible, provide opportunities to move around.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Schedule is for a 2-hour-and-15-minute Bible school session. For other session times, see below.

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| GATHER (10 minutes) Small groups meet to begin the session. | WORSHIP (25 minutes) Small groups converge for worship. A drama presents the Bible story. | BIBLE/CREATIVE/ACTIVE RESPONSE (30 minutes each) Small groups rotate to participate in three stations each day. Activities focus on Bible story themes. Creative Response time includes a snack. | SEND (10 minutes) Blessing and dismissal in small groups or in total group assembly. |
|---|---|--|--|

Modified schedule

If you have 2 hours:

Gather—5 or 10 minutes
Worship—20 minutes
Respond—75 minutes
 Active—25 minutes
 Bible—25 minutes
 Creative—25 minutes
Send—5 or 10 minutes

If you have 1½ hours:

Gather—5 minutes
Worship—20 minutes
Respond—60 minutes
 Active—20 minutes
 Bible—20 minutes
 Creative—20 minutes
Send—5 minutes

If you have 1 hour:

Worship—15 minutes
Respond—45 minutes
 Active—15 minutes
 Bible—15 minutes
 Creative—15 minutes

Day 1

DISCOVERING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Biblical background

The Bible shares just this one story about Jesus' boyhood. It is an important one for children, helping them to understand that Jesus was young once, too.

At age 12, Jesus travels with his parents to Jerusalem to observe the Passover festival. We know from Mary and Joseph's presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple that they observed traditional religious events and rituals. It is no surprise that they make the journey to Jerusalem for Passover. Their faith is a natural part of their life and part of their identity.

Most of the story takes place after the event, as the family travels home. After a full day of walking, Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is not with them. They are traveling with a group—a community of family and friends—and assumed Jesus was walking with others.

When they realize Jesus is missing, they return to Jerusalem and search for three days until they find him in the temple. Jesus is with the teachers, talking, listening, and asking questions. The teachers are surprised and amazed at his understanding!

When Mary tells Jesus how worried they were, he responds, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v. 49). Neither Mary nor Joseph fully understands, but Mary treasures the experience.

This story reminds us to take children and their faith experiences seriously, as the teachers did with the young Jesus. Young children are capable of reflecting about God, so embrace their enthusiasm and allow their faith to grow.

Hearing a story about Jesus as a boy allows children to see him as someone who understands them. When Jesus was in the temple, he asked questions as many children do. As a result, he grew in wisdom. Children will learn that they can ask questions, too, and learn and grow in their faith.

Today's Bible experience

Luke 2:41-52

Summary

Jesus' parents travel home to Nazareth after observing Passover in Jerusalem, and discover that 12-year-old Jesus is not with them. They return to Jerusalem and find Jesus in the temple, asking questions and talking with the teachers.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can ask questions and grow in wisdom.

Session materials

- Bible
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* music, songbook, and music player

Advance preparation

- Pray for the leaders and the children who will participate in Bible school today.
- Read Luke 2:41-52. Read over the worship plan and prepare for today's worship.
- If using a music group to lead singing, have the group practice the songs for the day.
- Coordinate with other leaders the logistics of the worship time.
- Plan how to teach the memory verses (p. 11).
- Learn about the offering project (p. 4). Create the visuals for keeping track of giving (p. 5). Place the offering basket at the back of the room.
- Gather props and visuals needed for worship and the drama. Have them ready on the stage.

WORSHIP PLAN

Gathering

1. **As children gather** in the worship space, have the music group singing or play music from the *Surprise!* CD.
2. **Welcome the children** to an exciting week of vacation Bible school. Raise your hand, and then ask the children to raise their hands. In many settings, children will also automatically put up their hands and become quiet.
3. **Surprise the group** by asking the children if someone has a question. After all, they are raising their hands! Raising hands is also a sign of wanting to ask a question.
4. **Introduce today's theme:** We can ask questions and grow in wisdom. Asking questions is how we discover and learn about the world around us and how we learn about God. We can ask who, what, where, when, and why.

Today the story is about Jesus, who asked questions and talked about many things. We will grow in wisdom if we ask questions, too.

Explain that all of the stories during VBS are about Jesus. The children will be surprised and discover many things about Jesus through the stories.

Worshipping

1. **Lead the call to worship.** Prepare children to pray this thanksgiving prayer as a call to worship. Invite children to raise their hands and say "Thank you, God!" when prompted. Repeat the phrase and raise hands several times with the children before you begin.

Leader: O God, we give you thanks for a new year of vacation Bible school. We pray for each child here today.

Response: Thank you, God!

Leader: We pray for all the leaders and helpers.

Response: Thank you, God!

Leader: Thanks for the stories and songs that help us learn.

Response: Thank you, God!

Leader: Thanks for curiosity and wonder.

Response: Thank you, God!

Leader: Thanks for questions and wanting to find answers.

Response: **Thank you, God!**

Leader: Thanks for wisdom and growth.

Response: **Thank you, God!**

Leader: Amen!

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- “The Temple”
- “Bless the Lord”
- “Just Like You”

3. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Explain that each day the children will learn part of it so that it can be recited together on Day 5.

The Bible stories that help children discover Jesus are about Jesus welcoming the children to share, ask questions, and be blessed by God. Children are very important to God!

Let the little children come to me, do not stop them.

Use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn this part of the passage.

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

4. **Open your Bible** to Luke 2:41-52 and explain that today’s story of Jesus comes from Luke’s gospel, soon after the Christmas story. It is the only story in the Bible of Jesus as a child.

5. **Introduce the drama.** Can you imagine Jesus as a 12-year-old boy? What do you think he was like? What do you think he did? What did he think about?

Explain that in the drama, the children will meet Jesus when he was 12 years old! And what he was like might be surprising!

Add that two children, Zac and Zoe, are in all of the dramas during VBS. In today’s story, Zac and Zoe are on a journey. They have simply been told, “Go to Jerusalem. Keep your eyes open. See what you find.” Let’s meet them.

6. **Watch the drama**, pages 32–34.

Responding

1. **Ask the children** to close their eyes tight and think about what they just saw and what they learned about Jesus. Wait 10 seconds in silence and then give a signal when children may open their eyes. Encourage the children to “keep your eyes open” and see what they might discover this week at VBS. Encourage children to ask questions this week, just like Jesus did in the temple. Asking questions will help children grow in wisdom.
2. **Pray:** *Thank you, God, for the gift of questions. Help us to ask questions, just like Jesus did, so that we can grow in wisdom. Thank you for each child that is here at VBS this week. Amen.*
3. **Connect to the Mass.** Explain that each story about Jesus this week has a connection to what we do at Mass each week. Mention that when Jesus went to the Temple, that was one of the ways he went to church. The teachers in the Temple were like priests or leaders in our parish, and the Scripture they would have talked about was from what we call the Old Testament today (the New Testament was written after Jesus died). We still read from the Old Testament each week at Mass: in the First Reading and the Psalm.
4. **Introduce the offering project.** Offering projects and visuals are suggested on pages 4–5. Share about the offering project and where the money will go. Invite children to bring a money gift each day of VBS. Explain how the offering will be gathered, and how the bread symbols will be used to keep track of the amount of money given.

Bring the offering basket forward from the back. Connect the offering to today’s story of Jesus as a child by sharing how everyone can give to others—even children. Lift up the offering basket over your head and pray: *Bless these gifts, O God. Amen.*

Sending

1. **Explain the schedule.** The children will meet with other Bible school leaders to explore more activities related to the Bible story.
2. **Give a sending blessing.** Explain that this blessing of God will go with the children each day. As leader, say the words with arms wide open:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
 The LORD make his face to shine
 upon you, and be gracious to you;
 The LORD lift up his countenance
 upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)
3. **Play the Surprise! CD** or have the music group play as the children leave the worship space.

Day 2

DISCOVERING JESUS WITH THE CHILDREN

Biblical background

The story of Jesus blessing the children is a familiar one. People bring children to Jesus, but the disciples stand in their way. Perhaps they feel Jesus is too busy, or perhaps they are caught up in Jesus' words and don't want to be interrupted. Maybe they don't want to let others into their space.

We don't know why the disciples tried to keep children away, but we do know that Jesus was indignant. He insisted that they let the children come. Jesus not only welcomes the children but blesses them, saying, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (v. 15)

Jesus embraces the children and all that comes with being a child. This is a marked departure from the culture of the day, in which children had little significance and were seen as weak and defenseless. In this story, the disciples are the ones with power, and they try to use it to keep the vulnerable children away.

But Jesus showed another way—overturning those with power and defending those who are weak. Perhaps the kingdom of God is not about power, but about powerlessness. Perhaps the kingdom of God is not about greatness, but about being vulnerable and humble.

We know Jesus is with us and with the children attending vacation Bible school. Allow time for children to ask questions, or to quietly be present with Jesus. Give them the opportunity to feel heard and blessed.

Children will delight in knowing that Jesus embraces, blesses, and values them. Help them to see Jesus at VBS, through one another, the Bible stories, and the games and crafts. Let children know they are significant to Jesus and that he wants to be with them and bless them.

Today's Bible experience

Mark 10:13-16

Summary

People bring their children to Jesus, but the disciples turn them away. Jesus sees this and insists that they let the children come to him. He takes the children in his arms and blesses them.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can receive the blessing of Jesus.

Session materials

- Bible
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* music, songbook, and music player

Advance preparation

- Pray for the leaders and the children who will participate in Bible school today.
- Read Mark 10:13-16. This is a key passage for the whole week (note the memory verses) with its emphasis on the welcome and acceptance of children. Read over the worship plan and prepare for today's worship.
- If using a music group to lead singing, have the group practice the songs for the day.
- Coordinate with other leaders the logistics of the worship time.
- Talk to one of the front-row VBS leaders about the "Be Quiet the Longest" contest and their sneezing role (Gathering #3).
- Plan how to teach the memory verses (p. 15).
- Prepare the visuals for keeping track of the offering (p. 5). Place the offering basket at the back of the room.
- Gather props and visuals needed for worship and the drama. Have them ready on stage. Note that the drama today uses one VBS group, so that leader and group will need to be prepared for their role.

WORSHIP PLAN

Gathering

1. **As children gather** in the worship space, have the music group singing or play music from the *Surprise!* CD.
2. **Welcome the children** to the second day of Bible school! Raise your hand as you did during the last VBS session. This will be the pattern for each worship session to get the children's attention.
3. **Introduce a "Be Quiet the Longest" contest.** Say: *We are going to have a contest to see who can keep quiet the longest, starting right now!*

After a few seconds of silence, have one of the VBS leaders near the front sneeze very boldly and loudly several times. As leader, automatically respond "Bless you." Then admit that you both lost the contest. Talk about how hard it is to be quiet, and that children are often told by adults to be quiet. Is that always fair?

4. **Introduce today's theme:** We can receive the blessing of Jesus. Ask the children if they know what *blessing* means. Refer to saying "bless you" when someone sneezes. A blessing is a way of asking for God's protection or favor or approval. Before eating, people pray a blessing or grace for the food. During today's story, we will learn about how Jesus welcomed and blessed children, even when the disciples wanted to keep the children quiet and away from Jesus. We too can receive the blessing of Jesus.

Worshipping

1. **Lead the call to worship.** Prepare children to pray a prayer of blessing or thanks to God. Invite children to put their hands together in a prayer position and to say "Bless the Lord" when prompted.

The Bible often uses the word *blessing*. Sometimes it even has people say “Bless the Lord,” which is a way of people giving praise or thanks to God. In Hebrew the phrase “bless the Lord” is *Baruch Adonai*, and many Jewish prayers start that way.

Leader: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless
God’s holy name.

Response: Bless the Lord

Leader: for creating a beautiful world.

Response: Bless the Lord

Leader: for your love and goodness.

Response: Bless the Lord

Leader: for welcoming children.

Response: Bless the Lord

Leader: for protecting us and wanting the best for us.

Response: Bless the Lord

Leader: for offering us your blessing.

Response: Bless the Lord!

Leader: Amen!

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- “Bless the Lord”
- “Children of God”
- “Just Like You”

3. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Remind children that they will learn part of it each day.

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

Use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn the passage.

4. **Open your Bible** to Mark 8:13-16 and explain that the memory passage for the whole week is from today’s story of Jesus welcoming children. This story is in the middle of the ministry of Jesus.

5. **Introduce the drama.** Zac and Zoe are in today’s drama again. They are pretty typical children—often noisy and playing games and having fun. The drama also includes one of Jesus’ disciples. Explain that the disciples were people who followed Jesus. This disciple wants to keep things quiet and undisturbed for Jesus.

Say: *How do you think Jesus will respond when he meets a bunch of children? I wonder what will happen. I wonder if we’ll be surprised. Let’s keep our eyes open and see what we find out.*

6. **Watch the drama**, pages 36–37.

Responding

1. **Ask the children** to close their eyes tight and think about what they just saw and what they learned about Jesus. Wait 10 seconds in silence and then give a signal when children may open their eyes.

The questions help children to reflect on the story and what it might mean for them. While it is okay for a few children to share their responses with the group, you may want to allow time for children to think about their responses silently.

- What do you think it would be like to receive a blessing from Jesus?
- What does it mean to be a child of God?
- Was there anything in the story that surprised you?

Explain that you want to give the children a special blessing. You may want to hold your hands out to the group as you say: *God loves you. You are a child of God.*

2. **Pray:** *Thank you, God, for paying attention to children and listening to them. Children are important to you. Thank you for welcoming and blessing them. Thank you for welcoming and blessing us. Amen.*
3. **Connect to the Mass.** Explain that today's story reminds us about how we gather for Mass each week. Jesus wants everyone to be welcome and come to him (especially kids!). We come to Mass to be closer to Jesus, and at the beginning of the service the presider passes on Jesus' blessings to us.
4. **Introduce the offering project.** Offering projects and visuals are suggested on pages 4–5. Connect the offering to today's story of Jesus blessing the children by sharing how the money we give helps to build up the kingdom of God.

Bring the offering basket forward from the back. Lift it up over your head and pray: *Bless these gifts, O God.*

Sending

1. **Explain the schedule.** The children will meet with other Bible school leaders to explore more activities related to the Bible story.
2. **Give a sending blessing.** Explain that this blessing of God will go with the children each day. As leader, say the words with arms wide open:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make his face to shine
upon you, and be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up his countenance
upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

3. **Play the Surprise! CD** or have the music group play as the children leave the worship space.

Day 3

DISCOVERING JESUS IN THE CROWD

Biblical background

We don't know much about the boy in today's story, but he plays a key role in one of Jesus' miracles. The boy is part of a crowd following Jesus and listening to him speak. The boy, not knowing how long he will be away from home, has brought his lunch along. Imagine his surprise when Jesus' disciples want the food! Why should he give up his lunch? Besides, how could one boy's lunch feed a large crowd?

The boy's food sets the stage for Jesus to perform a miracle that satisfies people's hearts and bodies. Jesus takes the lunch of bread and fish, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples to distribute. The food not only feeds everyone in the crowd, but there are leftovers! Twelve baskets of bread are carefully gathered so nothing is wasted.

The miracle of this feast has people saying that Jesus is a prophet. They do not yet recognize Jesus' divinity, but know that he must be someone special. The boy has given his lunch and it has blessed others.

God uses our gifts, too. Though we may be surprised at what God asks of us, we should never be surprised at the ways God uses what we give to bless others.

Children and their gifts are important to God. This particular story helps children understand that our contributions, no matter how small or unimportant they may seem, can be blessed and multiplied to do great things. Inviting someone to play, for example, will make that child happy. The child's happiness, in turn, can be passed on to others. Or perhaps children will choose to do an extra chore around the house to help ease the family's schedule. No gift is too small or unimportant for God!

Today's Bible experience

John 6:1-14

Summary

Hungry crowds travel to hear Jesus speak. There is no food except a young boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish. Jesus takes the lunch, blesses it, and the food multiplies to feed everyone.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can give to others and bless them.

Session materials

- Bible
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* music, songbook, and music player

Advance preparation

- Pray for the leaders and the children who will participate in Bible school today.
- Read John 6:1-14. Read over the worship plan and prepare for today's worship.
- If using a music group to lead singing, have the group practice the songs for the day.
- Coordinate with other leaders the logistics of the worship time.
- Plan how to teach the memory verses (p. 19).
- Prepare the visuals for keeping track of the offering (p. 5). Place the offering basket at the back of the room.
- Gather props and visuals needed for worship and the drama. Have them ready on the stage. Note that today's drama uses one VBS group, so prepare that leader and group for their role.

WORSHIP PLAN

Gathering

1. **As children gather** in the worship space, have the music group singing or play music from the *Surprise!* CD.
2. **Welcome the children** to the third day of Bible school! Raise your hand to get the children's attention.
3. **Hold up a large chocolate bar** (choose one that can easily be divided into sections). Tell the children that you have a piece of chocolate and are very hungry. Explain that there is not enough chocolate to share with everyone, but maybe there are some people who could have pieces of it.

Invite several adults to come forward for a piece of chocolate. Tell them that the chocolate is a thank-you for all of the hard work they put into vacation Bible school. Thank them for planning such a wonderful VBS experience! Invite the children to cheer as a way of expressing thanks to the adults, and hand each adult a piece of chocolate.

4. **Introduce today's theme:** We can give to others and bless them. Explain that yesterday the Bible story was about Jesus blessing the children. Today's story is about being blessed by God, and sharing that blessing with others. Add that one of the best ways to do that is through sharing. When people share, they realize that they have more than enough.

Worshipping

1. **Lead the call to worship.** Prepare children to pray a prayer about blessings and sharing. As people are blessed with things, they can share those things with others. Invite children to hold their arms out wide and to say “God, help us learn to share!” when prompted.

Leader: O God, you have given us so many good gifts.

Response: God, help us learn to share!

Leader: You have given us many talents and abilities.

Response: God, help us learn to share!

Leader: You have given us the gifts of time and energy.

Response: God, help us learn to share!

Leader: Help us see all we have as more than enough.

Response: God, help us learn to share!

Leader: God, you bless us to be a blessing to others.

Response: God, help us learn to share!

Leader: Amen!

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- “Put It In the Hands of Jesus”
- “Go Make a Difference”
- “Children of God”

3. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Remind children that they will learn part of it each day.

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.

Use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn the passage.

4. **Open your Bible** to John 6:1-14 and explain that today’s story was part of Jesus’ ministry near the Sea of Galilee.
5. **Introduce the drama.** Zac and Zoe are in today’s drama again. They are getting tired and hungry from their journey, and they are trying to figure out what they are searching for. But then they meet Jesus again, and he has a tired and hungry crowd around him. In fact, there are five thousand people who need something to eat!

Say: I wonder what will happen. I wonder if we’ll be surprised. Let’s keep our eyes open and see what we can find out.

6. **Watch the drama**, pages 40–41.

Responding

1. **Ask the children** to close their eyes tight and think about what they just saw and what they learned about Jesus. Wait 10 seconds in silence and then give a signal when children may open their eyes.

The questions help children to reflect on the story and what it might mean for them. While it is okay for a few children to share their responses with the group, you may want to allow time for children to think about their responses silently.

- It was pretty amazing what Jesus did with Zac's lunch. I wonder what went through Zac's mind, or the disciple's minds, or the minds of those in the crowd.
 - Zac was willing to share his lunch to help others. What kinds of things can you share with the people around you?
 - Why do you think Jesus blessed the bread?
 - Was there anything in the story that surprised you?
2. **Pray:** *Thank you, God, for your gift of generosity. You give us enough—enough for ourselves, but also enough to share. Help us to share with joy so that others can be blessed. Amen.*
 3. **Connect to the Mass.** Today's story reminds us of the part of the Mass called the Offertory or Preparation of the Table. At this part of the service each week, we gather together simple gifts and offer them to Jesus (just like the boy in today's story). That includes bread, wine, and money (the collection). God turns the bread and wine into something surprising: Jesus' body and blood, and helps us use the money to do his work in the world.
 4. **Introduce the offering project.** See pages 4–5 for suggestions. Connect the offering to today's story of Jesus multiplying the bread by reflecting on how much money has been collected so far during VBS (show offering visual). Add that giving just a little bit each day is one way to share with others.
Bring the offering basket forward from the back. Lift it up over your head and pray: *Bless these gifts, O God.*

Sending

1. **Explain the schedule.** The children will meet with other Bible school leaders to explore more activities related to the Bible story.
2. **Give a sending blessing.** Explain that this blessing of God will go with the children each day. As leader, say the words with arms wide open:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
 The LORD make his face to shine
 upon you, and be gracious to you;
 The LORD lift up his countenance
 upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)
3. **Play the Surprise! CD** or have the music group play as the children leave the worship space.

Day 4

DISCOVERING JESUS AT NIGHT

Biblical background

Nicodemus, a religious leader, has questions about Jesus and wants to learn more. He already knows that no one can do the things that Jesus does apart from God. But what does this mean? He seeks Jesus at night, under cover of darkness, to find out.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (v. 3). Some Bible translations use the phrase “born again” and others use “born anew.” Nicodemus wonders how it is possible to be born as an adult. Jesus replies that a person must be born of water and the Spirit to be part of the kingdom of God and receive new life.

Nicodemus continues to ask questions, and Jesus answers them. He tells Nicodemus about God’s love for the world and about eternal life. He points out that those who believe in God will be in the light. They will do good deeds and people will see them. Perhaps Jesus used this imagery because Nicodemus came to Jesus during darkness. We don’t know why Nicodemus chose to seek Jesus at night, but perhaps he wanted to make sure no one saw them together.

The conversation must have convinced Nicodemus. He is mentioned two more times in the Bible, and in both cases he is supportive of Jesus (John 7:45-52; 19:38-42).

This story is reassuring to children who have lots of questions. They will learn that adult leaders like Nicodemus have questions, too. As a vacation Bible school leader, recognize that it’s okay for you to have questions as well. It is these questions that help us learn more about ourselves, about God, and about our faith. Asking questions shows a desire to learn and grow. Encourage children to ask their questions. You will all learn a lot!

Today's Bible experience

John 3:1-21

Summary

Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. He has seen Jesus’ miraculous signs and wants to know more about him. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born from above and that God loves the world and wants to save it.

Bible memory

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can choose to seek Jesus.

Session materials

- Bible
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* music, songbook, and music player
- Flashlight

Advance preparation

- Pray for the leaders and the children who will participate in Bible school today.
- Read John 3:1-21. The Nicodemus story is a challenging passage for adults and children. Ask for God's guidance as you share this story at a level that the children can grasp and appreciate. Read over the worship plan and prepare for today's worship.
- If using a music group to lead singing, have group practice the songs for the day.
- Coordinate with other leaders the logistics of the worship time.
- Plan how to teach the memory verses (p. 23).
- Prepare the visuals for keeping track of the offering (p. 5). Place the offering basket at the back of the room.
- Gather props and visuals needed for worship and the drama. Have them ready on the stage.

WORSHIP PLAN

Gathering

1. **As children gather** in the worship space, have the music group singing or play music from the *Surprise!* CD.
2. **Welcome the children** to the fourth day of Bible school! Raise your hand as you did during the last session to get the children's attention.
3. **Dim the lights in the room for a few seconds.** Ask several questions for the children to think about quietly:
 - How many of you love it when it is dark? What do you like about the dark?
 - What might be scary about the night?

Add that sometimes it is at nighttime, just before going to bed, that people experience the most thoughts and questions—questions about the day, about life, about fears and worries, about the future. Sometimes the best questions are thought at night, when it is dark. Turn the lights back up.

4. **Introduce today's theme:** We can choose to seek Jesus. Today's story is about someone seeking Jesus at night because he wanted to ask Jesus many questions. The answers Jesus gave give new light and understanding. We can choose to seek Jesus, too.

Worshipping

1. **Lead the call to worship.** The Bible tells us that God is the light of the world. Prepare children to pray a prayer about God's light. Invite children to say "God is the light of the world!" when the flashlight is turned on. (Turn on a flashlight when children are to speak, and turn it off when the leader speaks.)

Leader: Let us give praise to our God!

Response: God is the light of the world!

Leader: We see signs of your activity in our world.

Response: God is the light of the world!

Leader: You listen to all our questions.

Response: God is the light of the world!

Leader: You loved the world so much that you sent us Jesus.

Response: God is the light of the world!

Leader: Come, let us seek out Jesus.

Response: God is the light of the world!

Leader: Amen!

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:
 - "We Are the Light"
 - "Just Like You"
 - "Go Make a Difference"
3. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Remind children that they will learn part of it each day.

And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn the passage.
4. **Open your Bible** to John 3:1-21 and explain that this story of Jesus happened when people were just hearing about Jesus and trying to find out more about him.
5. **Introduce the drama.** Explain that today's story takes place at night. A religious leader, a Pharisee, is named Nicodemus. He has lots and lots of questions about Jesus, so he visits Jesus during the night. Jesus tells Nicodemus stories, but they sound like riddles that are hard to figure out.

Say: I think Zoe and Zac are starting to figure out more about who Jesus is. I wonder what will happen. I wonder if we'll be surprised. Let's keep our eyes open and see what we find out.
6. **Watch the drama**, pages 44–45.

Responding

1. **Ask the children** to close their eyes tight and think about what they just saw and what they learned about Jesus. Wait 10 seconds in silence and then give a signal when children may open their eyes.

The questions help children to reflect on the story and what it might mean for them. While it is okay for a few children to share their responses with the group, you may want to allow time for children to think about their responses silently.

- What a strange and wonderful story. Did you understand all of the riddles?
 - Nicodemus chose to seek out Jesus and ask him lots of questions. What kinds of questions would you love to ask Jesus if you could?
 - Was there anything in the story that surprised you?
2. **Pray:** *Thank you, God, for the night—for that time of wondering and asking questions. Help us to seek and follow Jesus, day or night. Amen.*
 3. **Connect to the Mass.** Jesus tells us that water and light should be important to us. We use them every week when we go to Mass. As we enter the church we dip our finger in holy water and bless ourselves with it to remember our baptism. And what do we say? (Have them make the Sign of the Cross). We also always have candles lit to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world. When a baby is baptized during Mass, we dunk them in water or pour water over them, and then we light a candle for them to give him or her the light of Christ.
 4. **Introduce the offering project.** Offering projects and visuals are suggested on pages 4–5. Connect the offering to today's story about darkness and light by explaining that when we share our gifts, we are bringing light into our world.
Bring the offering basket forward from the back. Lift it up over your head and pray: *Bless these gifts, O God.*

Sending

1. **Explain the schedule.** The children will meet with other Bible school leaders to explore more activities related to the Bible story.
2. **Give a sending blessing.** Explain that this blessing of God will go with the children each day. As leader, say the words with arms wide open:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
 The LORD make his face to shine
 upon you, and be gracious to you;
 The LORD lift up his countenance
 upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)
3. **Play the Surprise! CD** or have the music group play as the children leave the worship space.

Day 5

DISCOVERING JESUS ON THE ROAD

Biblical background

Two men walk to Emmaus discussing the troubling events of the past few days. As they walk, they are joined by a third man, who wants to know what is disturbing them. The men share that “Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (v. 19) was handed over by the religious leaders to be sentenced to death and crucified.

The third man is Jesus himself, but the travelers do not recognize him. They continue their story: it has been three days since Jesus’ death, and this very morning his tomb was found empty. What should they think?

Jesus responds by telling the travelers about Moses and the prophets. He interprets scripture for them. Though they still do not recognize Jesus, they ask him to stay with them. As they eat together Jesus takes the bread and blesses it, then breaks it and serves it. The travelers suddenly recognize Jesus, but as they do, he vanishes.

The travelers are inspired. They share that their hearts were “burning within” them (v. 32) as Jesus was talking. They know that something amazing has happened! They return to Jerusalem and share that Jesus has risen and they have seen him.

In this story, 21 years after the boy Jesus discussed and taught scriptures in the temple, he continues to teach. As he took loaves from the boy’s lunch and blessed and broke them to serve the crowd, Jesus breaks bread in this story. Just as Nicodemus had questions for Jesus, so do those who are traveling to Emmaus.

Jesus meets the travelers in their ordinary moments of walking to an ordinary town. Afterward, they realize the significance of this incident. Many times we too encounter God during ordinary moments. Help children to understand that throughout our days, God is with us. During ordinary moments of spending time with friends, taking a walk, eating, or otherwise, God is right beside us.

Today's Bible experience

Luke 24:13-35

Summary

Two men walk on the road to Emmaus, talking about Jesus’ recent death and the empty tomb. Jesus joins them and enters the discussion, but the men do not recognize him. They invite Jesus to stay and eat with them. As he blesses the bread and breaks it, the men recognize him.

Bible memory

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can recognize Jesus with us.

Session materials

- Bible
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* music, songbook, and music player
- Sunglasses

Advance preparation

- Pray for the leaders and the children who will participate in Bible school today.
- Read Luke 24:13-35. Read over the worship plan and prepare for today's worship.
- If using a music group to lead singing, have group practice the songs for the day.
- Coordinate with other leaders the logistics of the worship time.
- Plan how to teach the memory verses (p. 27).
- Prepare the visuals for keeping track of the offering (p. 5). Place the offering basket at the back of the room.
- Gather props and visuals needed for worship and the drama. Have them ready on the stage.

WORSHIP PLAN

Gathering

1. **As children gather** in the worship space, have the music group singing or play music from the *Surprise!* CD.
2. **Welcome the children** to the last day of Bible school! Raise your hand as you did during the previous sessions to get the children's attention.
3. **Put on a pair of sunglasses** and look at the children. Tell children that you can see them, but they can't really see you. We can learn a lot by looking in a person's eyes.

Look to the right or the left and ask if children call tell in which direction you are looking. Then ask if children can tell if your eyes are happy or sad. Then, take off the sunglasses.

Add that when people wear sunglasses, others cannot see their eyes and, in some ways, can't really recognize what people are thinking and feeling inside. People can hide behind sunglasses.

4. **Introduce today's theme:** We can recognize Jesus with us.

Say: *During VBS we have been saying "keep your eyes open." Today is the last day of VBS. Our eyes have been open every day and we have learned so much. We will learn even more today about who Jesus is. We can recognise Jesus with us.*

Worshipping

1. **Lead the call to worship.** Explain that in the opening prayer, we will acknowledge that Jesus is with us.

Put your two hands up to your eyes in the shape of binoculars. Instruct children that whenever you do that action, they may join you in praying together “Jesus is with us!”

Leader: O God, open our eyes to see you.

Response: Jesus is with us!

Leader: You gave us a world with so much beauty.

Response: Jesus is with us!

Leader: We want to notice the best in the people around us.

Response: Jesus is with us!

Leader: We try to keep our eyes open and learn about you.

Response: Jesus is with us!

Leader: There is also much we do not understand.

Response: Jesus is with us!

Leader: Help us to recognize and know Jesus.

Response: Jesus is with us!

Leader: Amen!

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- “On the Road to Emmaus”
- “Go Make a Difference”
- “We Are the Light”

3. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Today, say the entire passage from memory.

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to review the whole passage.

4. **Open your Bible** to Luke 24:13-35 and explain that this story is near the end of the gospel of Luke, after Jesus has been crucified and rose back to life.

5. **Introduce the drama.**

Say: *Do you remember when we first met Zac and Zoe and they were told to go to Jerusalem and keep their eyes open? They have been searching all week and still don’t know what they are looking for. Maybe today they will finally be able to see. I wonder what will happen. I wonder if we’ll be surprised. Let’s keep our eyes open and see what we find out.*

6. **Watch the drama**, pages 48–50.

Responding

1. **Ask the children** to close their eyes tight and think about what they just saw and what they learned about Jesus. Wait 10 seconds in silence and then give a signal when children may open their eyes.

The questions help children to reflect on the story and what it might mean for them. While it is okay for a few children to share their responses with the group, you may want to allow time for children to think about their responses silently.

- Did you notice that Jesus broke bread again, and that's when people recognized him?
 - Did Zoe and Zac keep their eyes open and finally find out what they were looking for? Who did they find?
 - When do you feel closest to God, like your heart is almost burning or pounding?
 - Was there anything in the story that surprised you?
2. **Pray:** *Thank you, God, for giving us eyes to see you and hearts to understand. Thank you for giving us Jesus. Thank you for a wonderful week at VBS where we could seek and find God together. Amen.*
 3. **Connect to the Mass.** At the end of today's story, Jesus shares Eucharist with the disciples, just like we do in Mass every week. That's when they recognize him and he disappears. Pay attention to the ways Jesus is trying to teach and surprise you when you go to Mass from now on!
 4. **Introduce the offering project.** Share how much money has been collected during VBS by looking at the offering visuals. Connect the offering to today's story of finding and recognizing Jesus by imagining together how many people will be blessed by the generous offerings and that this can be a way of recognizing who Jesus is.
Bring the offering basket forward from the back. Lift it up over your head and pray: *Bless these gifts, O God.*

Sending

1. **Explain the schedule.** The children will meet with other Bible school leaders to explore more activities related to the Bible story.
2. **Give a sending blessing.** Tell the children that even though this is the last day of VBS, you hope they remember this blessing. As leader, say the words with arms wide open:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
 The LORD make his face to shine
 upon you, and be gracious to you;
 The LORD lift up his countenance
 upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)
3. **Play the Surprise! CD** or have the music group play as the children leave the worship space.

BIBLE DRAMAS

Introduction

Dramas are an important part of the worship experience of *Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus*. They portray the Bible stories and invite children to discover surprising things about Jesus.

Characters

Each drama includes a list of characters. Try to recruit mature individuals who can add strength to the dramas, as well as youth and children who can learn from the more experienced actors. Working with several families would be ideal for having mixed ages, scheduling rehearsal time, and encouraging memorization at home. Two children, Zac and Zoe, are characters featured in each drama.

- **Day 1**—Zac, Zoe, Jesus (12 years old), Mary (mother of Jesus), Joseph (father of Jesus)
- **Day 2**—Zac, Zoe, Jesus, Disciple, one VBS group (leader and children)
- **Day 3**—Zac, Zoe, Jesus, Disciple, one older VBS group (leader and children)
- **Day 4**—Zac, Zoe, Jesus, Nicodemus
- **Day 5**—Zac, Zoe, Jesus, Disciple, Cleopas

Costumes

Zac and Zoe are children on a journey and an adventure. They should wear comfortable clothes, such as hiking pants or shorts, shirts, hiking boots, and outdoor hats. They each need a backpack, which will sometimes hold props for the dramas.

Jesus should dress in Bible-times Middle Eastern clothes, which could include a robe, belt, and sandals. Jesus could also wear a headband or cloth. The Day 1 drama will need a 12-year-old Jesus, but in the other dramas Jesus is an adult.

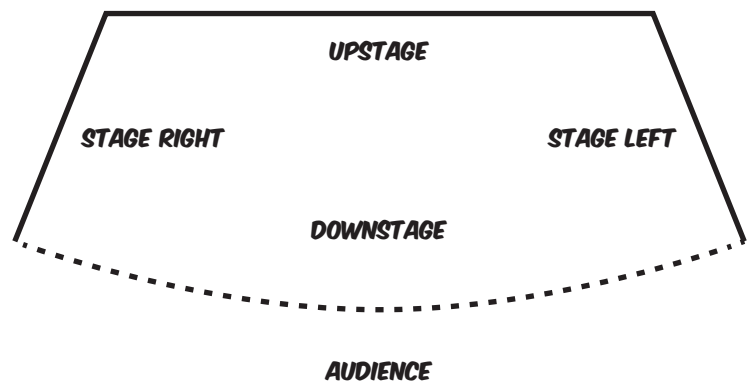
Other characters should also wear Middle Eastern clothes, similar to Jesus.

Props and staging

The stage is divided in half. Stage right is where the biblical stories are dramatized, and a simple stool is needed in this area. Stage left is where Zac and Zoe do most of their interaction, and they need a park bench, angled toward stage right. In addition to the stool and bench, each drama will also have various props to fit the day's story. Modify the list according to the available space and resources.

If space allows, create a backdrop for the stage depicting the movement from the city of Jerusalem on stage right to the countryside and region of Galilee on stage left.

- Use large boxes. Paint and stack them on stage right to create buildings such as the temple and houses, outlining the city. Rocks (real, plastic, or cardboard) can be added in the middle, along with green plants



and more greenery on stage left. Create a path out of flat rocks or pavers between the two sides of the stage, between the stool and bench.

- Create a large banner or mural on the back wall depicting Jerusalem and the temple on stage right, with a desert and sand countryside in the middle, and lush greenery and Sea of Galilee on stage left.

Rehearsals

Create a rehearsal schedule and make sure that the actors can attend. Distribute scripts several weeks in advance and encourage actors to become familiar with their lines.

Make it clear whether or not actors are to memorize the scripts. If so, give memorization goal dates. If memorizing seems too daunting, suggest that actors write their lines on small cue cards to carry with them.

Start by having actors read through the drama without moving around to allow them to get familiar with their lines. During the second read-through, begin to work with the actors on their movements and placements. Instruct them to move as their lines suggest. During the third read-through, give actors more concrete directions for movements. At the end of each rehearsal, take a moment or two to make helpful comments. Make sure everyone writes down your comments to them on the script.

There may be times when you wish to go through only part of a drama. Be clear in your instructions and considerate of those with smaller parts. It may be possible to practice their scenes first and allow them to leave.

Above all, have fun! The dramas are written to be enjoyed by actors and audience alike. When the characters are well prepared and rehearsals are fun, the stories will come to life and the audience will get the message.

Day 1**DISCOVERING JESUS
IN THE TEMPLE****Today's Bible experience**

Luke 2:41-52

Summary

Jesus' parents travel home to Nazareth after observing Passover in Jerusalem, and discover that 12-year-old Jesus is not with them. They return to Jerusalem and find Jesus in the temple, asking questions and talking with the teachers.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can ask questions and grow in wisdom.

Characters

- Zac
- Zoe
- Jesus (12 years old)
- Mary (mother of Jesus)
- Joseph (father of Jesus)

Props

- Stool (at stage right for all dramas)
- Writing tablet or clipboard, pencil or pen
- Park bench (at stage left for all dramas)
- Costumes (p. 29)

Preparation

The stage is divided in half. Stage right is where the biblical stories are dramatized. Day 1 is a temple scene. Jesus sits silently on a stool with a writing tablet or clipboard.

Stage left is an open space with a park bench in the back corner, angled toward stage right.

Drama

(Jesus sits silently on the stool, facing toward the wall [the temple]. He has a pencil and writing tablet or clipboard. He is concentrating and sometimes taking notes, other times raising his hand as if asking questions. He is a silent character until later in the drama.)

(Zac and Zoe enter from the back of the audience. As they walk toward the stage, they talk.)

Zoe: Zac, are we there yet?

Zac: Where, Zoe?

Zoe: There.

Zac: Where's there?

Zoe: Where we are going, that's where!

Zac: But we don't know where we are going. So there!

Zoe: I'm so confused. We have been walking all day, but we don't even know where we are going. It feels like we have been walking in circles!

Zac: All we were told was, "Go to Jerusalem. Keep your eyes open. See what you find."

Zoe: So we've been sent on a journey, but don't know what we are looking for.

Zac: Come on. It's an adventure. Who knows what we will find if we keep our eyes open.

Zoe: I think we are lost. We should have asked for directions. Maybe if you had asked more questions!

Zac: *(approaches park bench)* This looks like a good place to stop. I need a rest. *(sits down)*

Zoe: *(sits beside Zac)* What's over there? *(points to stage right)* I think it's the temple again! We have been going around in circles here in Jerusalem.

Zac: Maybe because it's so crowded. There are so many people going in and out of the temple. They must be here for the Passover festival.

Zoe: Passover? Isn't that the big festival where people remember how God saved our ancestors from Egypt?

Zac: I don't know. That was so long ago. Now I wish I had asked my parents more about it.

Zoe: Let's just sit here and watch for a while.

(Mary and Joseph enter from two different sides at the back of the audience. They are frazzled and anxious, yelling over at each other while moving among the children.)

Mary and Joseph: *(both asking several different children)* Do you know where Jesus is? Do you? Do you?

Mary: Joseph—I can't find Jesus anywhere!

Joseph: Me either, Mary. I thought you had Jesus when we left Jerusalem yesterday!

Mary: Me! You are supposed to watch out for him. You know that he has always been . . . well . . . different, unique, unusual, more sensitive or something. We have to keep an eye out for him. Are you sure he is not with any of the rest of the relatives—there are so many of us!

Joseph: I think we must have left him behind. Do you think he might still be at the temple? He sure liked it there for some reason.

Mary: I'm so worried. We have to go back and see if anyone has seen him. *(Arrives at stage. Sees Zac and Zoe.)* Have you seen a boy around here? He's 12 years old. About this tall. *(holds out hand to show height)* He's kind of wise-looking for his age.

Zac: There are so many people in Jerusalem right now. How would we recognize one boy?

Zoe: Wait. What about that boy we saw every time we passed by the temple? It was so strange. He was there with all the priests and teachers, listening and asking questions. Most kids wouldn't do that, especially at the temple. It was almost as if he knew something more than the teachers. They looked surprised and amazed!

Zac: I remember him. Yes, go over to the temple and maybe you'll find him.

Mary: Oh, that must be him all right!

(Mary and Joseph go to the temple, where they suddenly see Jesus, hand raised to ask a question. Zoe and Zac follow behind at a distance, watching.)

Joseph: Jesus! It's you!

Mary: Young man, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you!

Jesus: Why were you looking for me? Do you not know that I must be in my Father's house?

Mary: *(as if she is starting to say something, but then reconsiders)* But . . . um . . . we were so worried . . . your Father's house? . . . The temple? You've been here with the teachers, asking questions for three days?

Joseph: It's time to come home now, Jesus.

(Slowly Mary and Joseph and Jesus exit stage right, Mary with an arm around Jesus.)

Zoe: Did you see that? They found their son. They looked so worried. I thought they were going to yell at him. But then they just walked off together.

Zac: There's something about that boy. A kind of understanding or wisdom or something?

Zoe: I've always wondered what wisdom means. I thought it was knowing everything. But maybe it has more to do with being willing to ask questions, to be curious, and to wonder about the world.

Zac: Hmm . . . so maybe if we had asked more questions, we might know what we are looking for on this journey?

Zoe: You tell me. You're the "wise guy." Let's keep going. Keep your eyes open.

(Zac and Zoe exit stage left.)

Day 2

DISCOVERING JESUS WITH THE CHILDREN

Today's Bible experience

Mark 10:13-16

Summary

People bring their children to Jesus, but the disciples turn them away. Jesus sees this and insists that they let the children come to him. He takes the children in his arms and blesses them.

Bible memory

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can receive the blessing of Jesus.

Characters

- Zac
- Zoe
- Jesus
- Disciple
- One VBS group (leader and children)

Props

- Stool (at stage right for all dramas)
- Park bench (at stage left for all dramas)
- Football or soccer ball
- Costumes (p. 29)

Preparation

Invite a VBS group to help with the drama. The group leader will need to know how the drama works and prepare the children, and be comfortable bringing up the group with very little, if any, practice.

The ball is placed in the audience, which Zac finds shortly after the drama begins.

Drama

(Zac and Zoe run in on the left at the back of the audience, Zoe chasing Zac. They head toward the front of the room.)

Zoe: Zac, I'm going to catch you!

Zac: No you're not. You can't catch me!

Zoe: *(Zoe tags Zac, knocking them both down. They both start to laugh.)* Got you! Tag—you're it.

Disciple: *(unseen voice from offstage)* Hey kids, be quiet out there!

Zac: *(becomes still, listens)* Who was that?

Zoe: *(waves her arm dismissively)* Who knows? Adults. They always want us kids to be quiet. No fun!

Zac: *(picks up the ball)* Hey, look what I found! Let's play catch.

(Zac and Zoe throw the ball back and forth a few times, but then Zoe misses it and the ball goes flying.)

Zoe: Woops, missed!

Disciple: *(again from offstage)* Watch out! You could break a window or something!

Zac: There he goes again, telling us what to do. *(Zac and Zoe sit down on the bench.)*

Zoe: Nobody takes us seriously. Sometimes I wish that adults would actually listen to us.

Zac: I wish they wouldn't take themselves so seriously. Have some fun. There is nothing wrong with having fun.

(Disciple and Jesus enter from stage right.)

Disciple: Jesus, let's take a break from all of our walking and talking.

Jesus: Yes, that would be nice. *(Jesus sits down on stool.)*

(VBS leader comes forward from the audience, bringing along a few children.)

- Disciple:** *(to the VBS leader, astonished)* What are you doing?
- VBS Leader:** We've come to see Jesus.
- Disciple:** Oh, no you are not! This is not a good time.
- Jesus:** *(motioning for children to come closer)* Just wait. Let the children come to me. Don't stop them. Children belong in the kingdom of God. In fact, whoever doesn't become like a child will not enter this kingdom.

(One by one, Jesus blesses each child, placing his hand on their heads as he says, "God loves you. You are a child of God.")

(Zoe and Zac have been watching from the park bench. Zoe moves toward Jesus.)

Zac: Where are you going, Zoe?

(Zoe also receives blessing from Jesus and returns to Zac. Jesus, Disciple and VBS group leave stage.)

- Zac:** What did you just do? Why did you go to Jesus?
- Zoe:** I don't know. I just wanted to say hi to him. He was so gentle and kind. He said a blessing for me too.
- Zac:** Did you see the disciple? After Jesus welcomed the children, he was confused at first, but then he seemed to get it—like he was starting to realize how much Jesus listened to children and accepted them.
- Zoe:** Jesus said that children belong in the kingdom of God. I thought kingdoms were all about powerful kings and queens and important people.
- Zac:** Maybe Jesus is different. This kingdom sounds much more fun—like a place where you can truly be yourself. Where you can be like a child.
- Zoe:** Do you think this has something to do with what we are looking for?
- Zac:** Maybe. Keep your eyes open.

(Zoe and Zac exit stage left.)

Day 3**DISCOVERING JESUS
IN THE CROWD****Today's Bible experience**

John 6:1-14

Summary

Hungry crowds travel to hear Jesus speak. There is no food except a young boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish. Jesus takes the lunch, blesses it, and the food multiplies to feed everyone.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can give to others and bless them.

Characters

- Zac
- Zoe
- Jesus
- Disciple
- One older VBS group (leader and children)

Props

- Stool (at stage right for all dramas)
- Park bench (at stage left for all dramas)
- Granola bar (in Zoe's backpack)
- Lunch bag with 5 pieces of bread (in Zac's backpack)
- Baskets (up to 12; one can be the offering basket)

Preparation

Invite an older VBS group to help with the drama. The group leader will need to know how the drama works and prepare the children, and be comfortable bringing up the group with very little, if any, practice.

Drama

(Zoe and Zac enter stage left slowly, looking very tired and droopy. They immediately sit down on park bench, taking off their backpacks.)

- Zac:** *(exhaustedly)* I am so tired and very hungry!
- Zoe:** Me, too! This journey has been a long one, and we still don't know what we are looking for.
- Zac:** Maybe it has something to do with Jesus. Why do we keep meeting him everywhere? And do we have anything to eat?
- Zoe:** I think I have a snack in my backpack. Let me check . . .
(looks in backpack and grabs the granola bar) Yes, here it is—a small granola bar, just enough for me. *(opens it and is about to take a bite)*
- Zac:** Just wait. You're not going to share? What about me?
- Zoe:** But there is so little. If we each have some, neither of us will have enough.
- Zac:** But I'm hungry, too!
- Zoe:** Okay, okay, you can have some. But now I don't have much. Sharing is hard! *(Zoe breaks it in half, gives one piece to Zac, and they eat.)*
- Zac:** Thank you. I have some food in my backpack too, but it is for lunch. *(takes out lunch bag)* I packed it myself—five pieces of bread and two slices of fish. I can't wait until lunch-time. And yes, there is just enough for both of us.

(Jesus and Disciple enter stage right. Jesus sits on the stool. The VBS leader and group go to the stage and sit around Jesus. The Disciple and Jesus look out over the whole audience of children.)

- Disciple:** Wow, look at all these people. There must be at least five thousand people out there! They've been with us for hours. They must be really hungry.
- Jesus:** We need to find some food for everyone to eat.
- Disciple:** That will take a lot of food. You would have to work for about six months to earn enough money to buy food for everyone!

(Disciple moves around the stage and the audience, desperately trying to find some food.)

Zac: *(calls out)* Hey there! I have some food. It's not much, but you can have what's in my lunch bag.

Disciple: *(takes Zac's lunch bag, returns to Jesus)* Jesus, there's a boy with some food, but it looks like only five pieces of bread and some fish.

Jesus: *(Takes a piece of bread, lifts it toward heaven, and says a prayer.)* Bless this bread, O God. *(Jesus breaks bread into two pieces and begins giving pieces of it to the VBS children.)* Pass this out to everyone, and make sure you bring back the leftovers!

Disciple: Leftovers! There's not enough to feed everyone in the first place!

(The VBS group goes out into the audience and mimes handing out bread to the crowd. At the back of the room, the group picks up several large baskets, including the offering basket, and takes them to the stage.)

Disciples: What are you bringing back? These huge baskets are full of bread and fish. There are 12 filled baskets!

(Stage right characters exit.)

Zoe: Did you see that? We shared your bread and it turned into more and more. What a surprise! How amazing!

Zac: That was my lunch. My really small lunch! But it was enough. Everyone had enough. No one is hungry.

Zoe: Maybe sharing isn't as hard as we thought. Each of us has something to give. By sharing, it is like we are blessing others.

Zac: I bet there are lots of things we could share with other people. I suddenly have lots of energy again. Let's keep going on our journey. Maybe we are starting to find out something.

Zoe: Keep your eyes open!

(Zac and Zoe exit stage left.)

Day 4**DISCOVERING JESUS
AT NIGHT****Today's Bible experience**

John 3:1-21

Summary

Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. He has seen Jesus' miraculous signs and wants to know more about him. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born from above and that God loves the world and wants to save it.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can choose to seek Jesus.

Characters

- Zac
- Zoe
- Jesus
- Nicodemus

Props

- Stool (at stage right for all dramas)
- Park bench (at stage left for all dramas)
- Two flashlights
- Costumes (p. 29)

Preparation

Find a way to dim the stage lights.

Drama

(Lights are dimmed on stage. Zac and Zoe sneak onto stage left, take flashlights out of their backpacks, and turn them on. They bump into each other and Zac jumps.)

- Zoe:** I love the nighttime. I feel so sneaky. The air is clear. It feels so cozy.
- Zac:** Speak for yourself. I get scared at night. It's dark. You can't see anything. What if something bumps into us?
- Zoe:** Lighten up. The night is the time for stories and riddles. I've got one for you. Answer this: "I am the first thing you see in the morning, but I go out each evening. What am I?" *(pause)* Give up? "I am light." Get it?
- Zac:** Okay, I get it. You turn the light off before bed. I have one too, kind of like that one. "Each morning I lie at your feet. All day I follow you no matter how fast you run. Yet I nearly disappear in the midday sun. What am I?"
- Zoe:** Hmm . . . Oh, I know . . . your shadow!
- Zac:** Speaking of shadows, I think that's what most scares me about the night. All the shadows. Nothing is as clear as during the daytime.
- Zoe:** Shh . . . I think I hear something. Somebody is coming this way. Quick, hide behind this bench. Keep your eyes open.

(Zac and Zoe jump behind bench, Zac closest to stage right. Jesus enters and sits on stool. Nicodemus follows soon after and stands very close to Jesus, pretending to whisper their conversation. Zac can hear the conversation and relays snippets back to Zoe.)

- Zac:** There's Jesus again. And the other person looks like that temple leader. I think he is a Pharisee. I wonder why he is coming to meet Jesus in the middle of the night. It's like he doesn't want anyone to see him talking with Jesus, like that would be dangerous.
- Zoe:** Can you hear what they are saying? Tell me.
- Zac:** I can catch bits of conversation if I really listen. *(pause, listening)* His name is Nicodemus. He seems to really respect Jesus as a teacher, and all the signs he does.
- Zoe:** Yeah. Is there more?
- Zac:** Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God again. *(pause, listening)* He just said that Nicodemus must be born again, born from above—as an adult, not a baby. That's strange. Then he said you can be born of water and the Spirit.
- Zoe:** It sounds like they are talking in riddles, too.

- Zac:** Wait, there's more. (*pause, listening*) Jesus said, "The wind blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."
- Zoe:** (*shakes her head*) The kingdom of God is confusing. Being born from above, water, Spirit, wind. What does it all mean?
- Jesus:** (*out loud this time*) 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.

(Nicodemus and Jesus continue talking in mimed whispers.)

- Zac:** Now he's talking about light and how light replaces the darkness.

(Jesus and Nicodemus stop whispering and exit stage right. Zac and Zoe emerge from behind the bench.)

- Zoe:** That is neat. So if you follow God, God gives you a new life and brings light into your life.
- Zac:** And it is all because God loves the world so much. It is like shining a huge flashlight on the world.

(Zac and Zoe shine their flashlights all around the stage and audience.)

- Zoe:** I wonder what Nicodemus is thinking about all of this? Jesus sure surprised him with a lot of things. I wonder if his life will be different from now on.
- Zac:** I wish we could talk to Jesus and ask him some more questions.
- Zoe:** Zac, you said something that stuck with me yesterday about our searching and journey. You said that maybe our searching has something to do with looking for Jesus. Do you think that is what it is?
- Zac:** It does feel like Jesus keeps showing up wherever we go. We keep learning more, but we also keep having more questions. It's like one big riddle.
- Zoe:** Remember, even Jesus asked questions as a little boy. Let's keep trying to follow him.
- Zac:** Sure. I just realized that I don't feel so scared of the dark anymore! Keep your eyes open!

(Zac and Zoe exit stage left.)

Day 5**DISCOVERING JESUS
ON THE ROAD****Today's Bible experience**

Luke 24:13-35

Summary

Two men walk on the road to Emmaus, talking about Jesus' recent death and the empty tomb. Jesus joins them and enters the discussion, but the men do not recognize him. They invite Jesus to stay and eat with them. As he blesses the bread and breaks it, the men recognize him.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can recognize Jesus with us.

Characters

- Zac
- Zoe
- Jesus
- Disciple
- Cleopas

Props

- Stool
- Park bench
- Bread
- Zoe wears sunglasses
- Zac has sunglasses in his backpack
- Jesus wears a hat and sunglasses
- Costumes (p. 29)

Preparation

Place a loaf of bread on the stool.

Drama

(Zac enters stage left. He puts down his backpack near the park bench as if he is done traveling. Zoe enters next, wearing sunglasses and trying to look cool. Zac takes second look.)

- Zac:** Is that you Zoe? With the sunglasses? I hardly recognized you with those on.
- Zoe:** Of course it's me, Zac! Who do you think? We've been walking together for days! You know—keeping our eyes open! Seeing what we can find.
- Zac:** Yeah, but with those glasses on I can't see your eyes. That's how you really know who someone is.
- Zoe:** *(Throws her backpack beside Zac's backpack.)* It looks like you are done. Finished with your journey.
- Zac:** We have searched everywhere—high and low, near and far. We've found nothing. And we still don't know what we are searching for. So yes, I am done! I am sitting down. *(sits on park bench)*
- Zoe:** You need to calm down. Just like me. Get out your sunglasses and look cool. *(Sits down gracefully with shades on.)*
- Zac:** Okay, relax, you say. Maybe we have been trying too hard. Maybe we just need to wait and see what finds us. *(Pulls out his own sunglasses from backpack and puts them on.)*

(Jesus, Disciple, and Cleopas enter in back of audience, stage right. Jesus is wearing a hat and sunglasses. They are talking and slowly walking toward the stage.)

- Jesus:** What are you talking about?
- Cleopas:** You must be new in town! Everyone's talking about him and what happened.
- Jesus:** About who? What happened?
- Cleopas:** Jesus, that's who. We thought he was the one. All the teaching and healing and signs. We had so many hopes!
- Disciple:** But the leaders arrested him and gave him a death sentence on a cross. That was three days ago. But some of the women in our group were at the tomb and report that Jesus' body is missing. An angel told them that he was alive!
- Jesus:** Oh, how foolish you are. How slow of heart. The Messiah needed to suffer these things.

(They continue to talk quietly, using hand gestures, as they walk onto the stage. Jesus passes by the stool and heads towards the bench.)

Cleopas: Wait! Stay with us. It is almost nighttime. You must be tired from your long journey. Come and eat dinner with us.

(Jesus returns and stands behind the stool. He picks up the bread and uses the same motions with the bread from the Day 3 drama: lifts bread towards heaven and says a prayer.)

Jesus: Bless this bread, O God.

(Jesus breaks bread into two pieces. He gives the Disciple and Cleopas a piece of bread. As they eat it, facing the audience, Jesus backs away from the stool, drops his hat and sunglasses on the floor, and exits stage right quickly and quietly.)

Disciple: *(finish eating the bread, look around)* Where did he go? He's gone. But that was Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God! He had to be Jesus!

Cleopas: I could feel it in my heart. It was like my heart was burning!

Disciple: We need to go tell everyone else! Jesus has risen! He is alive!
(they run off stage right)

Zac: *(Zac and Zoe stand up, remove sunglasses)* Wow! Did you see that? That was cool!

Zoe: Remember your bread? Remember when Jesus took your bread and said those exact same words? Did those same things with his hands?

Zac: Of course I remember! That's how they recognized that the man was Jesus. Their eyes were opened. Jesus is alive! It was the bread. Boy, they looked surprised. Their hearts must have been pounding!

Zoe: And Jesus explained everything to them! It's like Jesus knew exactly what they needed to hear, could answer all their questions, and find everything they were searching for.

Zac: So maybe . . . just maybe . . . we have found something, too.

Zoe: What do you mean?

Zac: That's it. We have been searching all week, all over Jerusalem, looking for something. But maybe it is right in front of our eyes. It was Jesus we were looking for all along!

Zoe: That's right! First we saw Jesus as a child, and he was the one asking questions. That's when we started asking questions, too! Then we saw him welcome all the children. He welcomed me! He called me a child of God.

Zac: Then Jesus took my little lunch, my bread and fish, and it became enough for everyone. I'm still surprised by that.

Zoe: And remember how scared you were of the dark? But then after you saw Jesus talking with Nicodemus you weren't so scared anymore.

Zac: And now the bread again. In sharing food the disciples realized that Jesus is alive! Jesus gives life!

Zoe: It kind of feels like my heart is burning, too. Like I have found something too!

Zac: We've been searching all over the place, just to be surprised and find out that Jesus is right beside us, all the time.

Zoe: Yes, God is with us. Maybe our job now is to tell others—to invite them to join us on the journey and look for Jesus together.

Zac and Zoe: (*facing audience, loudly*) Keep your eyes open!

(*Zac and Zoe exit stage left.*)