



STORIES **AND** RITUALS

LESSON 17

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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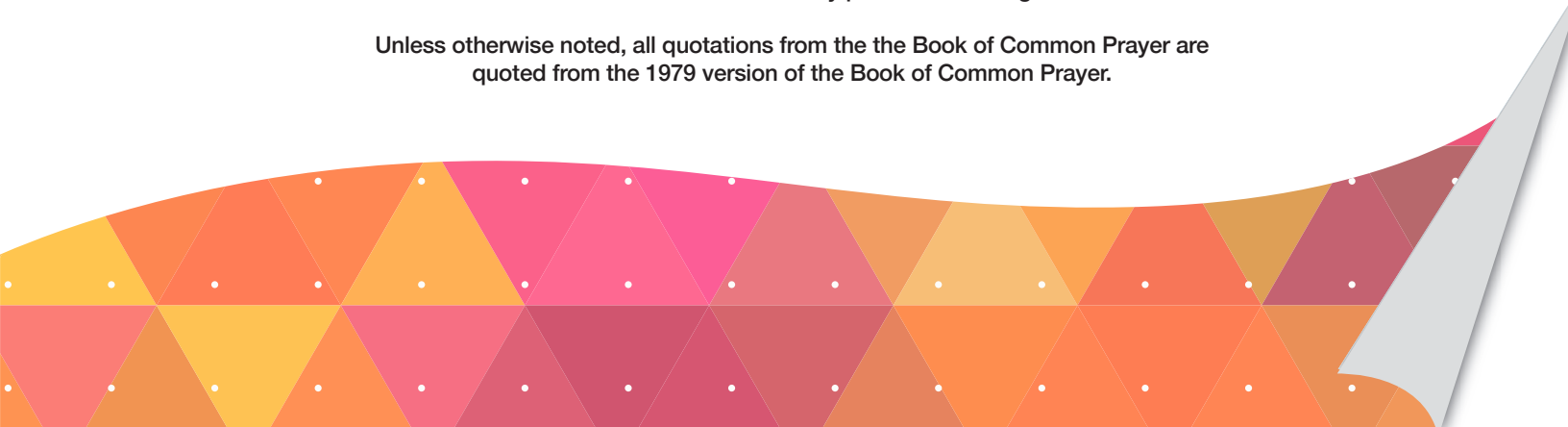
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Simeon & Anna Celebrate Jesus

Texts: Luke 2:22-28

Big Idea: God is the answer to our searching.

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Identify ways they find answers to their searching by playing a game.
2. Understand that God provides answers to our searching by engaging in a re-telling of the story of Simeon and Anna.
3. Illustrate a way God has provided answers to them by creating an art project.

ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)
Group Check-In

Community Builder (15 minutes)
Some “Loaded Questions”

The Story (15 minutes)
Simeon & Anna Celebrate Jesus

The Ritual (15 minutes)
Answers to our Searching

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)
Canticles

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)
Closing Prayer

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Nothing

- Slips of paper
- Pens or pencils
- Hats or bowls

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 17.1

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Large Cross
- Paper
- Markers

- Book of Common Prayer (or access to the BCP online)
- Paper
- Pencils or pens

- Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW



What's the Story?

Today's story is found in Luke 2:22-28. This text tells the story of Jesus' presentation at the temple, where the prophets Simeon and Anna recognize the child in their presence as the one who will bring salvation to the people of Israel. In the liturgical church, we typically tell this story during the Presentation of Our Lord, celebrated on February 2nd.

Jesus' presentation at the temple took place in the context of the ritual of purification, a ritual act that typically took place forty days after the birth of a child. This ritual included a sacrifice made at the temple in Jerusalem. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, two individuals recognize the child as the Savior and Messiah who would bring salvation to God's people. Both Simeon and Anna praise God for this child and celebrate his presence in the world through song and proclamation.



What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the big idea that *God is the answer to our searching*. For thousands of years, the people of God waited and searched for the Messiah to come and bring them salvation and peace. In this story, both Simeon and Anna proclaim that Jesus is the answer to the peoples' searching by stating that he is the Messiah who has come to be a light to all nations and salvation to all peoples. We also search for and seek answers to our questions about life and faith. Although it's not always obvious, God can bring us answers to our searching.



What's the Symbol?

There are many different things people use to search for answers to their problems and questions. We use books, the Internet, human resources, and much more. Gather some of these things to use as an illustration of how people search for answers. If possible, include some self-help books, a Bible, a device that can search the Internet, and other things that provide answers to life questions.



What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to think about a time in their lives when they have sought answers, wants, or needs. Then, they will illustrate these moments in their lives by creating a drawing, picture, or other expression. Participants will then offer their creations to God and thank God for being present and providing us with answers when we are searching for something.



Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Set up a table and cover it with fabric or linen. On the table, place a few candles, the symbols for this lesson, and a large cross. Place nearby paper, and markers for the ritual. If you are using the Community Builder activity, gather the supplies needed for the game.

DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:
Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week?** Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

Some “Loaded Questions”

Materials:

- Slips of paper (several per person)
- Pens or pencils
- Hats or bowls (2)

Before the session:

- Secure all supplies needed for the game. You should have enough slips of paper for each person to have 5-10 slips each.

During the session:

- Say: **Have you ever played the game “Loaded Questions?” We’re going to play a version of that today. Right now, I am going to give you each a slip of paper. On your slip of paper, write one question you have that has never been answered before.**
- Hand out slips of paper and a pencil or pen. Invite participants to write their questions on the slip of paper. Then, have them fold their slips and place them in a hat or bowl.
- **Now I am going to draw one of your questions and read it out loud. Once I do, each of you should take another slip of paper and write down how you would answer that question—whether you know the answer or not.**

COMMUNITY BUILDER - CONTINUED

- Pull one question and read it aloud. Give participants time to write their answers. Once they have written their answer on the paper, they should fold up their slip of paper and place it in your second hat or bowl.
- After everyone has submitted their answers, mix up the slips of paper. **Let's find out how well we know each other. I am going to pull someone's answer and read it out loud. Once I do, your job as a group is to guess who wrote the answer!**
- Pull an answer slip out of the hat or bowl. Read it aloud. Give the group three guesses to figure out whose answer was read. After three guesses, invite the person who wrote the answer to reveal themselves, if the group has not already guessed.
- Continue pulling answers and reading them aloud, inviting the group to guess who wrote the answer.
- A round is over when all of the answers have been pulled and read aloud. If you have time, start a new round by pulling a new question. Read the question aloud and invite participants to write their answers, then guessing who wrote each answer.
- Continue playing the game until you run out of time, or until you have asked all of your questions.
- **When you have a question, where do you go to find the answer? How do you search for the answer?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: books, the Internet, family, friends, etc.]*
- **When you have a question about your faith or about God, how do you search for the answer?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: clergy, Sunday school teachers, the Bible, etc. Some participants may not know how to answer this question; they may also think that they can't find answers to their faith questions. That's okay.]*



THE STORY

(15 MINUTES)

Simeon & Anna Celebrate Jesus

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 17.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 17.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 17.1.
- **After the story, ask: What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God fulfills God's promises; God sometimes comes to us when we seek answers to questions or situations.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: We wait for God to be revealed to us; we search for God; we celebrate and rejoice when we discover God's presence in our midst.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world is waiting and searching with anticipation for salvation and redemption;*
- **Simeon and Anna both lived their lives waiting patiently and searching for God. They searched and waited, both knowing that God would be revealed to them when God was ready. They knew that the Messiah would come to bring salvation and peace to Jerusalem during a time when people were searching for and awaiting God's return to earth.**

THE RITUAL (15 MINUTES)

Answers to our Searching

Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (*optional*)
- Method for playing music (*optional*)
- Large cross
- Paper
- Markers

During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- **At the time of Jesus' birth, people were anxiously searching for and awaiting the coming of the Messiah. Through Jesus' presentation at the temple, God revealed Godself as the answer to the people searching. Think about a time when you have been searching for something. Maybe you were searching for hope or peace; maybe you were searching for something else.**
- Give participants time to think and reflect. Then, hand out paper and markers to each person.
- **In a moment, I am going to invite you to create something that illustrates a time when you were searching for something. You can color, draw, or write; this is your chance to be creative and to express your thoughts in any way you'd like!**
- Invite participants to spread out around the room and to think, reflect, and create. As everyone finishes, bring the large group together.
- **Look at your drawing. Did you ever find an answer to your searching?** If the group is comfortable doing so, invite a few participants to share their stories.
- **Sometimes God is the obvious answer to our searching, and sometimes God isn't. It would take many people a long time to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, as the one who would bring peace, hope, and the kingdom of God. However, as people of faith, we know that God is the answer to our searching. No matter what we want or need in our lives, God will always be there to love us and provide for us.**
- Turn everyone's attention to the cross. **I invite you to come one at a time and offer your creation to God and to our altar area. When you bring your offering forward, thank God for always being present in the world, and ask God to always help you find the answers you are looking for.**
- Invite participants to come one at a time to the cross and offer their creations. Once everyone has offered their papers, invite for a participant to close this activity with a prayer.

DIG DEEPER

(10 MINUTES)

Canticles

Materials:

- Book of Common Prayer (or access to the BCP online) for each participant
- Paper
- Pens or pencils

During the session:

- Invite participants to look up Canticale 17 (The Song of Simeon) in a Book of Common Prayer (the song can be found on page 93 in the 1979 BCP).
- **Do you recognize the words of this song? You should. These are the words of Simeon in today's story! If you page through the canticles in the Book of Common Prayer, you will see that many of them reflect songs or prayers of people in the Bible. Look through the canticles. What other Scripture passages do you see?**
- Invite participants to look through the prayer book and share some of the other songs and canticles that they see.
- **Many of the canticles are songs of praise and thanksgiving for answered prayers. In many of these, the person singing the song is praising God for bringing them an answer to something they are searching for.**
- Give each participant a sheet of paper and a pencil or pen. **Today I am going to invite you to write your own canticle. You can base it on a real life experience, or not. This is an opportunity for you to express your thoughts and feelings about how God brings answers to your searching.**
- Invite participants to find a spot in the room where they feel comfortable working. Give them time to write their canticles.
- As participants finish, bring them back together in a large group. If individuals are comfortable doing so, invite a few members of the group to share their canticles.

WRAP IT UP

(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

Mighty God, you are always present in our lives, and you come to us when we call on you with our wants and needs. Help us remember that those who search for you will find you, even if you come to us in unexpected ways. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Sheet 17.1

Simeon & Anna Celebrate Jesus

A story from the Gospel according to Luke:

Forty days after Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph took their child to Jerusalem, to the temple, in order to present him and dedicate their child to God. They did this because it was commanded to them through the laws of Moses. While at the temple, they offered a sacrifice to God.

In Jerusalem, there was a man named Simon. Simeon was a righteous man who dedicated his life to God. It had been revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. Feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit, Simeon entered the temple. When Mary and Joseph entered the temple with Jesus, Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Lord, you now have set your servant free
to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A Light to enlighten the nations,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

When they heard all that Simeon was saying about their child, Mary and Joseph were amazed. Then, Simeon blessed the family and said to Mary, “This child will be responsible for great things in Israel, and he will have an effect on many people. Some people will fall because of him, but to many, he will bring joy and hope. Many will see him as a sign from God, but yet many others will oppose what he says and does. Even a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

There was another prophet in Jerusalem, whose name was Anna. Anna was very old; she became a widow seven years after she married her husband. She lived until she was eighty-four years old. Anna never left the temple; instead, she spent full days there, fasting and praying. Anna saw Simeon and the family and began praising God. She began telling others about the child; she proclaimed the good news to those who were searching and waiting expectantly for God's return to Jerusalem.