

Reaffirm, Redeem, Rename

Advent is complete, and the Christ has come. How might we, in this Christmas season, reaffirm the good news we waited to receive? How can we rename this redemptive act of God coming into the world, not letting the time pass by as though unimportant, but living into a greater understanding of God's workings in the world?



Focus scripture
Luke 2:22–40

Additional scriptures
Isaiah 61:10—62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4–7

Focus scripture: Luke 2:22–40

The story of Jesus' circumcision and naming follows the birth narrative. While we know that the child would be named Jesus, the name Joseph the angel gave Joseph, this is the ceremonial naming, like that of an infant at its baptism. This naming was a claiming of the child into their family. The writer also makes us aware of the necessity for this act due to the law of Moses, giving us a glimpse that even from infancy Jesus, by way of his parents, followed the law God had passed down through Moses. The prophetic voices of Simeon's and Anna's declarations further affirm Mary's and Joseph's understanding of who their child is and will be, not just for the redemption of Jerusalem but for the salvation of all people.

Isaiah 61:10—62:3 begins with a focus on the redemptions bestowed upon us by God. Speaking of the garments and jewels adorning a bride and groom, these are not gifts that are innate but are given by the grace of God. The imagery of a shoot in a garden helps us to understand that our redemption is not a one-and-done act of God, but a carefully nurtured and cultivated process. This is perhaps a theological pivot for the people of Israel to realize that salvation from their current plight is not immediate, and that the work of proclaiming and praising the name of God is not finished in an instant. The new name the writer describes is not mentioned, but seems directly related to the circumstance of the people, rather than an actual name to be given later. As such, it is not a far leap to conclude that we all can be renamed in our circumstance: that Christ is the breaker of

preconceived notions, stereotypes, biases and prejudices that were once used to identify a person or group of people.

Psalm 148 is almost a reflection of a creation story in Genesis, beginning with the cosmos then moving toward the earthly realm, and finally the creatures of Earth, the least of which is humanity. Amidst the praise that should come from all creation, we are reminded of the special relationship that the people Israel have as the chosen of God. The reaffirming statement in verse 14 draws the reader's mind back to the covenant between God and the people Israel, which continues to be fleshed out. Finally, the psalm helps the reader understand that praise to God is not complete without all parts of creation joining in that praise in equal measure.

Galatians 4:4–7 Paul begins this section by emphasizing the key actor in the work of redemption – God, through the work of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Adoption into the family of God is not of our doing, but God's; as family members we are also heirs to the kin-dom of God.

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Did Isaiah or the psalmist have in mind that righteousness and salvation would come into the world in a form as vulnerable as a newborn baby? Probably not, but Anna and Simeon saw in the Christ child salvation and redemption – a new beginning. Paul also sees the long-awaited hope taken form in Christ. As God's people, this is also our baby to bear and raise up. We are called to participating the creation of God's just realm on earth.

Spirit that strengthens us, grant us the courage to shout praise and adoration for the work of your hands. Grant us the peace and clarity of mind to think, act, and love in your name. Amen.

Lectio Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Materials for Epiphany can be found in the Library at www.seasonsonline.ca

When children are caught up in the excitement and rush of the Christmas season, they may not get the rest they need. Try to maintain a low-key environment during this session. If many families travel during this time, anticipate a smaller group and use this session to become better acquainted with the children who are there.

The story of Jesus' presentation in the temple is one that reinforces that Mary and Joseph are faithful Jews, who follow the rituals of their religion. This story helps the children to recognize that Jesus was tiny and

grew into childhood, just as they have done. Since the gospels include few stories about the childhood of Jesus, these accounts are helpful to establish Jesus' humanity.

The church is still celebrating the Twelve Days of Christmas, and the families may be as well. Encourage this and provide additional copies of "[The Twelve Days of Christmas](#)" (p. 34) for children who did not take one at the previous session.

Pray that the children will continue to celebrate and find joy in their faith as they grow in stature and wisdom, just as Jesus did.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Luke 2:22–40, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 35). Think about how these new parents felt when Simeon and Anna proclaimed such wonderful things about their infant child.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and *CD player*; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Set a worship space with white or gold cloth for the Season of Christmas, Christ candle, matches, offering basket, and Bible.
- Bring, if possible, song "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; and # on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[This Special Baby](#)."
- ❑ Bring nativity sets, enough pieces that each child will have one, but do not include the magi.
- ❑ Bring baby doll wrapped in a blanket.
- ❑ For conversation group, bring baby doll in

blanket and, if possible, song "Celebrate Emmanuel."

- ❑ For Bible research group, bring copies of this week's resource sheet "[Be a Bible Detective](#)," bookmarks, and directions. For The Bible story and us, bring if possible, song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Art zone:** white pillar candles; gold glitter, gold glitter glue, or gold foil paper; this week's resource sheet "[The Christ Candle](#)," and copies of note on "The Christ Candle" to send home
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** poster board
- ❑ **Music zone:** songs "Celebrate Emmanuel" and "I've Got a Voice" and bells
- ❑ **Christmas zone:** play dough or fast-drying modelling compound and bits of fabric
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** construction paper and envelopes

Bless

- ❑ Play, if possible, "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)



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Scripture

Luke 2:22–40

FOCUS To join in the joy of Anna and Simeon at the sight of baby Jesus

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. They will be eager to tell you about Christmas. An opportunity for more time for this conversation as a group is provided later in Gather.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Play “Celebrate Emmanuel” (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7). Invite the children to gather at the worship table. Point out the change of cloth from purple or blue to white or gold, the removal of the Advent wreath, and the prominence of the Christ candle.

Sing “Celebrate Emmanuel” as a child receives the offering. Light the Christ candle.

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

God of love, thank you for the birth of Jesus.
Amen.

After the prayer, receive the offering and extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Christmas joys The children will be eager to tell about their Christmases, so give them that opportunity as you prepare to recall the Christmas story. Attempt to contain their excitement by inviting each one who wishes to answer these questions or others that they prompt:

- **What was your favourite thing that happened on Christmas Day?**
- **Which gift were you most excited about giving to someone else?**
- **What is your family doing to celebrate the Twelve Days of Christmas (see p. 34)?**

For most children, it is quite difficult not to equate Christmas with gifts for themselves. Through these questions, you may be able to steer the conversation to what they did, who was there, and the joy of giving to others.

Engage

Prepare for the Bible story

Review nativity story Distribute the figures from a nativity set (minus any magi and camels). Tell the story of the birth of Jesus and the arrival of the shepherds. As each person is introduced in the story, have the child (or children) with the figure(s) come to form a tableau of the traditional nativity scene. In this case, multiple Marys and Josephs are fine as well as multiple angels, shepherds, and animals.

The Bible story

Special baby After the children return the nativity pieces to you and sit down, explain that the Bible story is from the gospel of Luke. Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table.

Find Luke in it. Then tell the story from this week’s resource sheet “[This Special Baby](#),” based on **Luke 2:22–40**.

After the story, ask:

- **What surprising thing happened in this story?**
- **How does this story about Jesus make you feel?**

The last question has no “right” answer, but it will encourage the children to recognize and name the feelings that a story can draw forth. For some, it will be “surprising” and for others “amazing.” Some answers will be less helpful, but after a moment or two most children will take the question seriously.

Explore the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

Conversation group

Take the baby used in the story. Place it in the arms of a willing child and invite the child to think of something to say to or about the baby Jesus. If the child is hesitant to speak, ask the group to say, "Thank you, God, for this special baby." Give each child a chance to hold the baby and say something, or for the group to say the sentence above. When every child has had a turn to hold the baby, sing "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) together.

Bible research group This group will explore the presentation of Jesus in the temple as a religious tradition of the time. Provide copies of today's

resource sheet "[Be a Bible Detective](#)," pencils, bookmarks, Bibles, and these directions:

- 1 Take a Bible, a copy of "[Be a Bible Detective](#)," a pencil, and two bookmarks.
- 2 Read and complete "[Be a Bible Detective](#)." You can work alone or with a partner.
- 3 When you finish, compare your work with others in this group.



The Bible story and us

Play "I've Got a Voice" (pp.20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) as the signal for everyone to gather at the worship table, or some other designated area. Invite the Bible research group to tell what they learned about the tradition of taking new-born babies to the temple.

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Art zone: Christ candle** Select a method for making Christ candles from today's resource sheet "[The Christ Candle](#)." Provide the material and have a leader in this zone to help the children select symbols. This is a good opportunity for an older church member to help for a day. Have copies of the note on "The Christ Candle" ready to send home with the candles. Provide this note for children who choose not to make the candles as well.
- ❑ **Quiet zone: Group poem** On a sheet of poster board, print "We see hope" with "hope" in fancy letters. Place it in this zone with drawing paper and markers or crayons. Next to it display these directions:

Seeing the special baby Jesus gave Simeon and Anna hope. Where do you see hope?

Take a sheet of paper and write about or draw pictures of places and things that give you hope.

Here's an example of something to describe in words or pictures: when I see a flower growing in the crack of a pavement.

When you finish, tape your paper to the poster board.



- ❑ **Music zone: Sing the news** Anna, often overlooked in this story, went to the people in the temple to show them the special baby and to tell the good news, "This is the child sent by God. This baby will free Jerusalem. Come, see, and give thanks to God." The children can continue that message by singing "Celebrate Emmanuel" and "I've Got a Voice," (p. 6 and pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 and #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7). Provide bells to accompany the singing and increase the sounds of joy.
- ❑ **Christmas zone: Anna and Simeon figures** The story of Simeon and Anna welcoming Jesus in the temple is the last story of the special baby in Luke's gospel. Have the children make figures of Simeon and Anna to add to their nativity sets at home. Provide play dough for the children to shape simple figures and dress them in bits of fabric. They may also want to fashion a tiny baby wrapped in a blanket to add to a scene with Simeon and Anna.
- ❑ **Outreach zone: Baby cards** Simeon and Anna welcomed the baby Jesus because they recognized that this special child was sent from God as the Messiah. The church welcomes every baby too. If your tradition is infant baptism, make welcome cards for babies when they are

baptized. Save them so the group can send one when a child is baptized. If infant baptism is not in your tradition, make cards to send to families when a baby arrives. Fold construction paper or stationery to fit

envelopes. Provide markers or crayons for the children to create the cards. When a card is sent, have all the members of the group sign it.

Bless

Gather Play "I've Got a Voice" (#13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) as the signal to gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle, or have a child light it.

Review the story by recalling what Simeon and Anna each said about the special baby Jesus.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own, and have the children repeat each line after you:

Child of hope,
we have longed for your birth.
May your love shine in us
as we travel this earth. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Blessing To each child, say, "(Child's name), remember the hope the baby Jesus gives us."

Reflect

As you think about each section of this session, when did you see or hear signs of hope from the children? Are there children in the group who show signs of a lack of hope? How might you bring hope into their lives? What might your congregation do to make every child, from infant to young adult, feel welcome as Anna and Simeon welcomed Jesus? Where can you take your ideas for further action?



This Special Baby

(based on Luke 2:22–40)

To add a little drama, hold a baby doll wrapped in a blanket as you tell this story. When Simeon or Anna takes the baby, give the doll to a child to hold.

Jesus, this special baby of Mary and Joseph, was a few weeks old. In those days it was the custom of the Jews to take a new baby to the temple to give thanks to God and receive a blessing. So Mary and Joseph made the journey to Jerusalem, where the temple was.

When they got there, they did all the expected things like all other mothers and fathers before them. But a most unexpected thing happened.

On that day, a very old and very wise man, Simeon, was in the temple. Simeon was filled with God's spirit. When he saw Mary and Joseph with the baby, he knew immediately that this was the one sent by God to be the Messiah. You see, much earlier the Holy Spirit had promised Simeon that he would not die without seeing the one God had sent to save God's people.

Simeon came to Mary and Joseph. He took the baby Jesus into his arms. Mary and Joseph weren't sure what was happening, but they

could tell that this was something special. Simeon looked at the baby tenderly. Then he said:

God, I am your servant.
You are letting me go in peace as you promised,
for I have seen your saving light and your glory
in this beautiful child!

Joseph and Mary looked at each other again, amazed. Then Simeon blessed the baby and handed Jesus back to Mary. To Mary, Simeon said, "This child will do wondrous things for Israel. This child will know great joy and even greater sadness. You will too."

Before Mary could take in what Simeon said, a very old woman named Anna came to them. She had lived in the temple for many years. She prayed there day and night. She too held the baby close. She walked around so other people could see this special baby, saying, "This is the child sent by God. This baby will free Jerusalem. Come, see, and give thanks to God."

On the way home, Mary and Joseph were quiet, each one thinking about what happened in the temple. How did those two old people know about their baby? What did Simeon mean?

In the years that followed, Jesus grew strong, full of wisdom, and God's blessing was upon this special child.



BE A BIBLE DETECTIVE

Read Luke 2:22–24 in your Bible.

These verses give you some information and some clues about why Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem and why they brought two pigeons or turtledoves.

- According to Luke, why did they come to the temple?
- But why did they bring two turtledoves or two pigeons?

Place a bookmark at Luke 2.

You, a Bible detective, can find the answer.

The answer would be in the law of Moses, and the law of Moses is in the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament. Perhaps your Bible has a footnote that says “Leviticus 12:2–8.”

What, you never heard of Leviticus? How will you find it?

Well, you could start at the beginning of the Bible and turn the pages until you come to Leviticus, but a good detective wouldn’t waste time on such a slow task.

No, a good detective would find the table of contents at the front of the Bible. (*Hint: Leviticus is in the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament.*) On what page does Leviticus begin?

Now find chapter 12. I am sure you remember that the chapter numbers are the large numbers on the page.

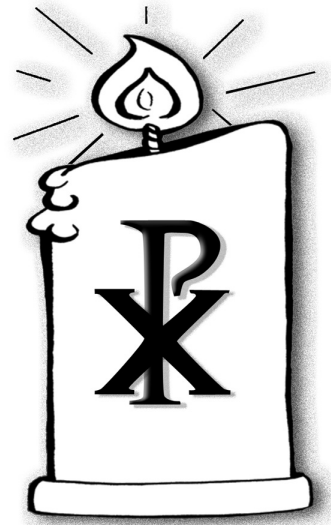
To find out about the turtledoves or pigeons, read verse 8 (*the verses are the tiny numbers, usually at the beginning of a sentence*).

- What did you learn about Mary and Joseph from being a Bible detective?

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The Christ Candle



Candle 1:

Materials:

- white pillar candles
- sharp pencils
- gold glitter and glue or gold glitter glue
- pictures of symbols of the Christ

Directions:

1. Select one or two symbols of Christ. Simple designs will work best.
2. Draw the symbols you have selected on the sides of the candle with a pencil.
3. When you are satisfied with the designs, draw over the design with glue or gold glitter glue. If you used plain glue, sprinkle gold glitter over the design. Let it sit for a moment and then shake off the excess glitter.

Candle 2

Materials:

- gold foil paper
- pencils
- scissors
- glue
- white pillar candles

Directions:

1. Select the symbols as above.
2. Draw the symbols on the gold foil paper. You might draw them first on plain paper and trace around them on the foil paper.
3. Cut out the symbols and glue them to the candle.

Ways to use your Christ candle at home:

- Light it every Sunday as a reminder of the Christian Sabbath day.
- Light it on Christian holy days such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, or Pentecost.
- Light it for special family celebrations such as birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, or a move to a new home.

Light is an important symbol in the Christian faith. Light reminds us of God's power and presence. We call Jesus Christ the light of the world. During the Christmas season, and at other times during the church year, a Christ candle is lit to remind us of Christ's presence in our lives.