

INCARNATION

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Pieces of paper with pre-written character descriptions (for the ice breaker)
- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: TAXI DRIVER TRANSFER

For this drama game, compile a list of interesting or quirky characters ahead of time (suggestions below), and write them on separate pieces of paper. To begin, one teen takes “the stage” and pretends to be a taxi driver. One of the other teens selects a piece of paper with a character description, without showing it to anyone. He or she must act out getting into the taxi cab – in character – and continuing as they drive along until the driver discovers who the character is. The taxi driver must then take on that character as well. When the driver has successfully guessed by taking on the character correctly, the passenger says “Pull over here!” The driver then exits the scene and the passenger shifts places to become the new taxi driver. The next teen up selects a new character, gets into the cab, and so on. *(Some character ideas: Bank robber trying to make a getaway; Can’t stop texting; Keeps seeing stray animals and wanting to rescue them; Compulsive nose picker; A famous actor; Speaks in a high-pitched voice; Terrified of germs; The Queen; An alien; Whistles after every sentence; Keeps talking about how everything was harder when s/he was a child; Forgot to change out of pyjamas; Chewing gum loudly; Absent-minded professor).*

FOR SMALL GROUPS, EACH PERSON WILL HAVE MULTIPLE TURNS. FOR GROUPS OF MORE THAN TEN, YOU MAY WISH TO SPLIT INTO TWO OR MORE GROUPS TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS A CHANCE “ON STAGE”.

THE LITANY: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the Litany, leaving off the Grace (which can be said at the close of the lesson).

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: GOING LOWER

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- If you did the “ice breaker”: Were there character traits that you took on in this game that you wouldn’t want to have to keep? Why?
- Have you ever had an experience of going from feeling “on top of the world” to feeling like a “nobody”? Tell us about it. Is that experience one that you’d ever volunteer for?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *There are probably plenty of character traits that other people have that we would not wish for ourselves, whether it is because they are socially embarrassing or simply unpleasant. It is natural for us to want to “put our best foot forward” and live lives that are comfortable and that gain the admiration of others.*
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- *(This is a great chance to tell a story of your own.) Maybe your teens have had the experience of moving to a new town or switching schools and going from having friends and feeling popular to being a social outsider. Or perhaps they know what it's like to be the best at something one year and then find themselves struggling to keep up the next. The experience of humiliation comes to everyone at one time or another, and it's not usually one we'd welcome (although it is one that can teach us a great deal). Most of us wouldn't volunteer to go through an experience like that unless we knew that at the end of it we would gain something that would make it all worthwhile.*

THE LESSON: PHILIPPIANS 2

The first part of the lesson (below) can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

The next section of the Litany that we're looking at is all about *how* it is that we are delivered. Jesus, God the Son, took on human flesh, lived a life of perfect obedience to God, died on the cross, rose again, intercedes for us at the throne of God, and will one day come again in glory! This is our story of deliverance!

The Old Testament is full of passages that recount what God has done for his people. Psalm 105 says, "Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!" (105: 1-2). In praying through these petitions, we are recalling all that God has done for us and all that he has promised still to do. We pray these words with confidence, knowing that "he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion" (Philippians 1:6).

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By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation... Good Lord, deliver us.

The word "incarnation" literally means "taking on flesh", and it is the word we use to describe one of the great mysteries of our faith: that Jesus, who is fully God, became human. *He became one of us.*

Sometimes when we recount the Christmas story we can get caught up in the amazing pageantry of angels and shepherds and wise men – and lose sight of the heart of what God was doing: what C.S. Lewis called "the grand miracle". He wrote, "The Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle... that what is beyond all space and time, what is uncreated, eternal, came into nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe..." St. John's Gospel puts it this way: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:1,14).

In a moment we'll take a look at St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, which reflects further on this great mystery.

Refer to Philippians 2:1-11.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS' NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they've just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What does this passage tell us about Jesus' incarnation (v6-8)?
- What does St. Paul want his readers to take from this passage?
- Why did Jesus humble himself?

If time permits, challenge your teens to close their eyes and reflect quietly on the incarnation as an act of love undertaken for them.

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A few notes and reflections for reference:

- The passage tells us that Jesus willingly chose to set aside his place of glory, to take on the lowliness of humanity in order to save us. An important doctrinal point related to this passage is the “hypostatic union” – that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine; though he gave up his place of glory, he did not cease to be the second person of the Godhead. The NRSV translation uses the word “exploited” instead of “grasped” in verse 6, which you may find a helpful rendering.
- St. Paul is holding up Jesus’ incarnation as an example of humility. He wants the believers at Philippi to embrace a similar attitude, not competing for the highest place, but serving one another in love.
- The passage tells us that Jesus was acting in obedience to the Father (v8), and alludes to the motive of love (v1-2). Other passages expound this more fully. “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9); and “Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...” (Hebrews 12:2). Notice that Christ’s humility in becoming human will be transfigured into exaltation! (v9-11)

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON’T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU’LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY “AT-HOME CHALLENGE” IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER](http://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER).)

Scripture is filled with prayers and praises in the form of poetry and songs. During this unit, try your hand at song-writing; drawing inspiration from the love God has for you, made evident in the work of Jesus Christ.

Spend some time this week writing your own song of praise inspired by the incarnation.

(Stuck? Spend some time instead reflecting on the words of this hymn penned by Samuel Crossman (1623-1683): “My song is love unknown, My Savior’s love to me; Love to the loveless shown, That they might lovely be. O who am I, That for my sake My Lord should take frail flesh, and die?”)

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon him and to be born of a pure Virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen. (THE COLLECT FOR CHRISTMAS DAY, BCP PAGE 104)

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CLOSING PRAYERS

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the "Grace", printed at the end of the Litany booklet.

PHILIPPIANS 2: THE HUMILITY OF JESUS

¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.