

WORD MADE FLESH

The Purpose of the Incarnation LIFE NIGHT OUTLINE

CATECHISM

- # 410-412
- # 456-478
- # 525-528

SCRIPTURE

- Genesis 3:15
- John 1:1-5
- 1 John 3:8

KEY CONCEPTS

- The central mystery of our faith is the Mystery of God becoming man in the Incarnation.
- There are four purposes of the Incarnation and each affects our daily lives as Christians.

GOAL

The goal of this Life Night is to help the teens understand why the Word became flesh and how the plan of salvation began well before the Son of God came to earth. The teens will have an opportunity to respond to this Good News and invite the Word Made Flesh deeper into their hearts through prayer.

ABOUT THIS NIGHT

The Incarnation is the mystery of God becoming man; as it states in the Nicene Creed, "For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven." The night will begin with a game similar to charades that will transition into the teaching emphasizing the four purposes for the Incarnation. The night will utilize the symbol of a ladder to show that God descended from the heavens to take on human nature. As a result of the Incarnation, humanity can now ascend this ladder to gain eternal life. In this world Christians continue to encounter the Incarnation in and through the Eucharist; the Incarnate God in our world today. After a time of discussion in small groups, the teens will spend time with the Word Made Flesh in Eucharistic adoration. The night will close with prayer and benediction.

PARENTAL NOTICE

This week we experienced the Incarnation in a deeper way. The night emphasized the four reasons why our God became man and the effects of the Incarnation, using the symbol of a ladder. The ladder helps us understand that God lowered Himself because He loves us and the Incarnation raises us to become more like Him. A few possible questions:

1. Why would the Almighty God lower himself to become a person?
2. How does the Incarnation relate to us today?

ENVIRONMENT

The environment for this night should be simple and clear. Place a ladder in the front of the room directly in the middle, and have the rungs of the ladder facing the teens. Have black cloth, poster boards with the words "sin," "death" and "rejection" to the left of the ladder to symbolize the world before the Incarnation. Hang white cloth, candles, poster boards with the words "life," "heaven," "salvation" and "glory" to the right of the ladder symbolizing the Light of the World that came through the Incarnation.

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

Song: "Love Comes Down" by Matt Maher (*Alive Again*, Provident Label Group)
 Song: "Strong Enough to Save" by Tenth Avenue North (*The Light Meets the Dark*, Provident Label Group)
 Song: "Love is Here" by Tenth Avenue North (*Over and Underneath*, Provident Label Group)
 Video: "The Journey of Alive Again: Incarnation" (Life Teen Video Support 10)

GATHER *15 Minutes*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (5 min)

The youth minister will welcome all the teens to the Life Night and introduce any teens at Life Night for the first time.

CHARADES WITH A TWIST (10 min)

The youth minister should introduce this game as a normal game of charades – there will be an actor who acts out a phrase to their team without using words; whichever team guesses the correct phrase first, wins! But what the actors do not know is there will be a little trick. Split the teens into random groups of five to eight. Ask each team to choose one actor who will give the clues. Once each team chooses an actor then send all of the actors outside the room. When the actors are out of the room a Core Member will give them *one* of the following options: 1) "Eve eating the apple in the Garden of Eden" OR 2) "Moses parting the Red Sea" (*They will only act out one of the phrases*)

Here's the twist – when the actors are out of the room the youth minister should tell the remaining teens the secret phrase. The reason for this is because the guessers are supposed to "play dumb" as their teammates are acting. The guessers are instructed to not guess the phrase and there will be no winner; so the teens can guess random words or say nothing at all. Yes, this will be frustrating for the actors but that is the point. Bring the actors back in and start the clock for two minutes. When the two minutes are up, the youth minister or Core Member should ask if there are any winners. There shouldn't be any winners if the audience has played along.

PROCLAIM *15 Minutes*

TRANSITION INTO THE TEACHING (5 min)

The youth minister should ask the actors if they were frustrated when no one could understand what they were acting out. The person giving the teaching should then address the whole group by asking how they think God felt throughout the Old Testament when He sent patriarchs, prophets and miracles for the people that they didn't understand? God sent the ultimate gift to the world, the gift of His only Son to become like us. This is the Incarnation.

THE PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION (10 min)

This teaching will focus on the four reasons for the Incarnation. Throughout the teaching utilize the image of the ladder and the contrast between the dark and light. Each rung on the ladder can be used as visual to show each step or reason for the Incarnation.

The teaching can be found on pages 23-25.

BREAK *20 Minutes*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (20 min)

Break the teens into small groups. Begin the group in prayer and have everyone introduce themselves to the group. Spend some time discussing the teaching. Use the questions below as a guide. If necessary, add your own.

Small Group Questions:

- Have you ever had an experience when you were so frustrated because a person you know just didn't understand? What does that feel like when you try to help someone but they reject you?
- What would this world be like if God never became man?
- The Incarnation happened so long ago, how does it still affect our lives?
- God became man so that He can be our model of holiness. How does Christ specifically model holiness for you?
- St. Athanasius tells us, "The Son of God became man so that we might become God." What does it mean that we become like God? How can we become like God?
- How do we experience the Incarnation in our daily lives?

SEND *25 Minutes*

RECAP OF LIFE NIGHT (5 min)

The youth minister should gather everyone back together in front of the ladder. Set a tone of prayer by lowering the lights and having soft music playing in the background. Have candles placed around the ladder or on the ladder rungs if possible. The youth minister should recap the night by reminding the teens of the four purposes of the Incarnation, especially that the Son of God became man so we can become like God. Use the ladder in the illustration – God descended to this earth so that we could ascend to be with Him in heaven. Emphasize the point that we are now called to respond to the Incarnation by loving God in return, so that one day we can share in His likeness. Just before the Eucharist is brought out for a time of Adoration the youth minister should now make the connection between God Incarnate and the Eucharist. Use the following as a transition into Adoration:

Jesus may not be walking around in our world today but we experience the Incarnation in a very real way at least once a week. As Catholics we truly believe that the Eucharist is the body of Christ. The Second Person of the Trinity descended into

this world to become one of us. He descended even further and allowed Himself to be bread for us. The Bread of Life that we receive at Mass enables us to climb the ladder so that one day we can reach our goal of heaven.

ADORATION OF THE BLESSED

SACRAMENT (20 min)

The monstrance should be placed directly in front of the ladder. Allow the first part of this Adoration time to be more reflective with softer background music. The second part of this time move into a time of praise and worship. The youth minister should wrap up the time of Adoration challenging the teens to desire to ascend the ladder so that they can be with God in heaven.

Close the night with Benediction and by asking the intercession of the Blessed Mother who received the Incarnation into her womb. Pray together the Hail Mary and Ave Maria.

GOING DEEPER

- Invite the teens to reflect on how the world would be different if God had not come into the world, in order to grow in gratitude for this gift.
- Host a Holy Hour at the parish. Have the teens lead a time of Scripture reflection. Challenge the teens to go to daily Mass.

ADAPTING THIS LIFE NIGHT

- For larger youth groups – There will not be much adaptation to this night except for the number of charade teams and small groups. Allow yourself more time to gather the groups due to the number of teens.
- For smaller youth groups - Have the teens speak their prayers and praises out loud in Adoration.

WORD MADE FLESH TEACHING

THE INCARNATION: FORETOLD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God knew from the very beginning that Adam and Eve would disobey Him. He also knew He would offer His Son as a sacrifice to bring the people back to Him. He knew that He was going to have to die for us, and He still chose to create us with an eternal soul, free will and in His image and likeness.

Right after the Fall of Man, the Lord God promised to redeem the human race, "After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall."

God's original plan for human beings is that they would enjoy His love and grace in His presence. In Genesis, God would walk through the Garden in the cool of the day. God did not create us to fall from His grace, but we did. Adam and Eve chose to disobey and rebel against the will of the Lord. God would not prevent human beings from turning against Him, because He created them with their own free will, but He did offer a plan of redemption to them—a second chance to be realized in future generations. This is announced after the Fall of Adam and Eve when God speaks to the serpent and tells it that one day a man will come to destroy evil. God did not abandon His people, "This passage in Genesis is called the *Protoevangelium* ('first gospel'): the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers...Furthermore many Fathers and Doctors of the Church have seen the woman announced in the *Protoevangelium* as Mary, the mother of Christ, the 'new Eve'."

So, right off the bat, we were told what to wait for—we know that the darkness will one day be overpowered by the light. We just weren't told when.

WHY DID THE WORD BECOME FLESH?

As Christians, we profess that, "for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." This is a central belief in the Catholic faith (hence its place in the Creed.) St. John tells us that, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." This moment is called the Incarnation; the moment when the Second Person of the Holy Trinity took on a human nature and human flesh, becoming man for the sake of our salvation. He was born of a woman and given the name Jesus.

Why did Jesus do this? He did it because He loves, but also so we could be restored to the original justice enjoyed by our first parents before the Fall. Without God becoming man, man would never be able to atone for his guilt, "The Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it." St. Athanasius tells us, "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." Christ incarnate gives us the chance to return to God's love and once again bear His likeness.

At the time chosen by the Lord, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to ask her if she would be the mother of the redeemer—*she was asked to be the Mother of God*. She cooperated with the Lord and through the power of the Holy Spirit, she conceived the Son of God. God prepared a place for His Son in the person of Mary, which is why she plays a great role in the story of salvation.

CCC 410

Genesis 3:8
Genesis 3:15
CCC 410-412

CCC 456
Nicene Creed
John 1:14

CCC 461
CCC 460

Luke 1:26-38

It is important to realize that Jesus Christ was not "part" man and "part" God. Christ is all man and all God: He has two natures. If He were not completely God, He would not have sufficient power to release us from the bonds of sin. He needed to be fully human to share the guilt of our sin and atone for the injustice of our first parents Adam and Eve. The Incarnation is the moment that changed salvation history and made God present among us in a way not seen since the Garden of Eden.

FOUR REASONS FOR THE INCARNATION

It is Christ who saves us: we do not save ourselves. We have to understand what sin is and what the effects are. Justice is receiving what is due you. When there is an injustice, something has to be done in order to restore the original justice. For example, when you hit a baseball through a neighbor's window, you have to pay for the repair. A sin is an unjust action against God. When we were created, we were made in His image and likeness. Sins are an injustice against God; they damage our relationship with Him. For there to be justice, we would have to do something in order to make up for the offense, but how could we ever do enough to make up for the offense against the Lord? We know that an action's significance is relative to the parties involved. If one child hits another child, the action is morally less severe than if a child were to strike his parent. So then how could a creature ever have the ability to reconcile with his Creator? If God is infinite, then any offense against Him is an infinite offense.

REASON 1

This situation is precisely the reason why the Lord chose to take on human nature, "The Word became flesh for us *in order to save us by reconciling us with God, who 'loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.'*" Human beings are incapable of offering the Lord anything that can ever fully atone for the wrong committed by our first parents' disobedience (as well as our own). Only someone as infinite as God could do this, but it would be unjust for God to fix our problems for us because we owe Him. This is why the Incarnation is so monumental. In the Incarnation, the Lord God takes on the sinful human flesh in order to restore it. As the person of Jesus Christ, a member of the human race, He is one of us. As a member of the Trinity, He is capable of making an offering suitable to God. The reality of our salvation hinges on this point.

CCC 457

REASON 2

Who can begin to understand this love? Jesus was condemned to death though truly innocent, tortured by those He was saving, abandoned by His closest friends and crucified amongst common criminals. The Lord endured these injustices out of love for us, "The Word became flesh so *that thus we might know God's love: '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.' 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'*"

CCC 458

REASON 3

To be holy literally means to be "set apart." When we say that we are called to be holy, we are affirming that we are called to be something special, set apart from the ordinary; something worthy of being called "God's." Jesus Christ is our model of holiness. Through His life and His teachings, He always points towards the truth and instructs us, by word and example, on how to live.

"The Word became flesh to be our model of holiness," as Jesus tells us, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.' I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.' On the mountain of the Transfiguration, the Father commands: 'Listen to him!' Jesus is the model for the Beatitudes and the norm of the new law: 'Love one another as I have loved you.' This love implies an effective offering of oneself, after his example."

CCC 459

REASON 4

Jesus reached out to replace the stony hearts of the people with new hearts of flesh. Jesus taught us the ways of God so that we may follow Him, that we may share in His life, "The Word became flesh to make us *'partakers of the divine nature'*: 'For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God...' The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods." The Church's mission is to again and again turn our hearts to Jesus for us to experience this partaking, this communion, with the divine nature. We can encounter this communion through the Sacraments and through prayer. These two tools of the Christian life must not be overlooked.

Lastly, the Incarnation is what destroys the power of the devil. At the Fall of Man, humanity cooperated with evil by disobeying the Lord. We mortally wounded our human nature, choosing to be selfish instead of selfless. The Incarnation gives us a second chance by showing us the true model of holiness, "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." The Incarnation is the light that shines in the darkness that darkness can't overcome.

Though evil is present in this world, it is only as powerful as we allow it to be. But we don't have to dwell in darkness. Because of the Incarnation, death is no match for life. Darkness is no match for the Light of the World. Because of Him, we have hope for our salvation. The war is won and our victory assured. All we have to do is to remain in the light, realizing that the Word has been made flesh. We can develop a relationship with the Eternal Word through prayer. He is our *creator*, "Through Him all things were made." He is also one of us—*human*. We have been given this incredible gift of the Son of God and we have to nurture our relationship with Him through prayer. Reading the Scriptures, discovering His life and finding Him a place to thrive in our hearts is the most basic call of every Christian.

Ezekiel 36:26
CCC 457-460

1 John 3:8
John 1:5

John 1:3

WORD MADE FLESH CHECKLIST

CORE PLANNING TEAM:

DATE OF LIFE NIGHT:

ONE MONTH PRIOR TO THE NIGHT:

Give copies of the Life Night to each of the members of the planning team. Each person should read the Scripture and Catechism references as well as review the planning guide before the brainstorming meeting.

Get the planning team together for a brainstorming meeting (this should last no longer than 1 hour). The team prays and discusses where the teens are in their faith journey in relation to this topic. Then using this planning guide as a starting point, the team adapts the Life Night to meet the needs of the teens and the parish. Create a detailed outline with any changes and/or adjustments.

Assign the person responsible for each part of the Life Night:

Environment _____

Introductions _____

Charades with a Twist _____

Small Groups _____

Eucharistic Adoration _____

Notes

TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO LIFE NIGHT:

Turn in a detailed outline of the Life Night to the youth minister. Allow the youth minister to give feedback and make any necessary changes.

Create a list of needed supplies and materials. Assign a person to be responsible for collecting and/or purchasing the materials needed.

Decide the people that will be doing the following things. Make sure they have a copy of the script and/or teaching outline. Inform them of any practices and/or deadlines.

Teaching _____

WEEK OF THE LIFE NIGHT:

Written outline of the teaching is given to the youth minister and practiced.

Run a dress rehearsal of the Life Night. Youth minister gives feedback.

Create environment and collect needed supplies.

E-mail entire Core Team an overview of the night.

DAY OF THE LIFE NIGHT:

Set up the environment. Make sure the room is clean and presentable.

Set up audio and video. Test the video clips to make sure both picture and sound work.

Walk the entire Core Team through the Life Night. Make sure all transitions are ready and everyone knows their roles.

Pray! Pray for the teens attending the Night. Pray for God's will to be done through the night. Pray over those involved.