



Jesus Dies and Is Buried

Goal: To remember Jesus' death.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Mark 15:33-(39) 47

So often, we jump from the exhilaration of Palm Sunday to the joyous celebration of Easter, especially with children who may not attend a Maundy Thursday or Good Friday service. Knowing the full story, that Jesus died, allows the resurrection to make sense. While the crucifixion of Jesus is a hard, complex, and violent story, we can learn about it in an age-appropriate way.

We are faced with a grim truth: those who rejected Jesus—and his message of truth, healing, justice, and love—simply wanted him dead. Mark's spare account moves from one brutal detail to the next as Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

As Christians, we know that the story does not end here. Jesus' death is the fulcrum point of the salvation story, the tipping point of our redemption. The rest of the story is foreshadowed by the details the gospel provides. First, the Roman centurion, who has observed everything, standing at the foot of the cross, says, "Truly this man was God's Son!" Then we see those who loved Jesus, at no small risk to themselves, take his body and place it in the tomb. Mark is careful to let us know that Joseph of Arimathea "rolled a stone against the door of the tomb," and that the two Marys were witnesses. Jesus has died, but the story is not over. It is just about to begin anew.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Adults, with more life experience, may not be as shocked by this story as children, who can be overwhelmed by it. Children, who have a fine-tuned sense of fairness, may wonder aloud when they hear this story: "What?! How could they do that?! He didn't do anything wrong! Where were his friends?!" This story may be troubling to hear, especially for very young children. It will be important to help them experience their feelings of sadness, but also to remind them that the story does not end here, and that Jesus does not stay in the tomb. Take care to help them understand that the most wonderful thing happened on Easter: God brought Jesus back to life!

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

One of the most important aspects of your role as a teacher is your relationship with the children you teach. Your genuine self, shared with them, is as valuable as any Bible lesson they might learn. So give yourself and the children permission to explore the grief and sadness this story stirs up; take time to listen to the children if they share their feelings. Acknowledge their feelings, and listen to their questions. If they ask a question you cannot answer, honestly admit it and suggest that the two of you might ask someone who would be able to help you understand.

Loving God, may I be present with the children in my care as we hear the sad story of Jesus' death. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 4, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

black cloth

various crosses

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

Responding

Claiming
SCM 4a

Celebrating
copies of GN 2

Praying
copies of GN 3

Extra
copies of GN 4

Children attending the session after a service may have a palm branch with them. Let the children know that the palm fronds given at their church may look different than the one on **GN 1** because they come from different kinds of palm trees.

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the children arrive, post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker on a clothespin. Use the schedule to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Welcoming and Preparing **LG** **LD**

Welcome each child with “Grace and peace be with you, *(Name)*.” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.” Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Place the black cloth over the table, place the candle in the center of the table, and add various crosses to arrange on the table.

Ask the children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Distribute copies of **GN 1** and invite the children to color green palm leaves and cut them out. Recall together the story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem when the crowd cheered Jesus and waved palm branches. Invite discussion from the children about a day or a week that may have started off really great and ended up being hard for them. Share your own experience or memory as well.

Add the palm branches to the worship space.

Singing

Listen to “Were You There”—**MM 17**; **SCM 21**. Play the song again and invite the children to sing the first verse of the song. Stop the song. You will play the second verse after “Reflecting on God’s Grace.”

Praying **M** **L**

Gather around the worship table. Turn on the candle. Allow a few moments of silence, encouraging children to focus on the light and to quiet their hearts and minds. Explain that you will pray a prayer and that they will repeat after you and follow your motions. Pray:

Thank you, Jesus, for coming to earth. (*index fingers point up, then down*) /

Thank you, Jesus, for living for us. (*index fingers tap together at the tips*) /

Thank you, Jesus, for suffering for us. (*index fingers point in opposite palms, signifying nails*) /

Thank you, Jesus, for dying for us. (*index fingers make a cross*) /

Thank you, Jesus, for loving us. (*point to one another*) /
Amen. /



Preparing to Hear the Story C

Tell the children that today is Palm Sunday, and ask them to recall what they can about the stories of Palm Sunday. Explain that, from Palm Sunday to Easter, a lot happens in a week! Comment that it's not all fun and celebratory like Palm Sunday and Easter, but actually sad and hard. Today's story tells about what happened to Jesus when he died.

- C Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Hearing the Story LG LD C

Invite a child to find Mark 15 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 4**, but not the sentences in the bold font or the questions in the italic font, as they will be used in the second reading of the story. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story again or listen to the story audio. On this second reading, pause and read the bold sentences and ask the questions in italics.

Reflecting on God's Grace C

Ask children to consider silently what they noticed about today's story as they listened with their imagination. Hand out play dough and invite children to sculpt the part of the story that stood out to them the most. After a few minutes, encourage them to share what they have created.

Use the following questions or prompts to engage the story further:

- ▼ What did you notice about today's story as you listened with your imagination?
- ▼ Tell us about the parts of the story that made you feel sad.
- ▼ What do you wonder about Jesus' death?
- ▼ What questions does this story make you have?
- ▼ What part of the story stood out to you the most?

Singing

Listen to the first verse of the song "Were You There"—**MM 17**; **SCM 21**. Invite the children to join in singing the second verse of the song. Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God's Grace C LD

Tell the children that you are going to affirm, or claim, what we know is true about Jesus.

Draw the children's attention to the crosses. Tell the children that it is true that Jesus died on a cross. Wonder together why we see or wear crosses today when it was the way used to kill Jesus. Suggest that God took a means of death and transformed it into a symbol of Jesus' love for us.

Display **SCM 4a** and tell children that Jesus was buried in a tomb probably similar to this picture. Ask them what they notice about the tomb. Place **SCM 4a** on the worship table among the crosses.

Provide sticky notes. Invite the children to write or draw as many things as they know to be true about Jesus, using one sticky note for each idea. Encourage the children to think of the stories they know about Jesus. Some ideas might be: Jesus was baptized, Jesus welcomed children, Jesus prayed, Jesus gave bread and wine to his friends, and so forth.

Have the children take turns naming what is on each note as they stick it to **SCM 4a**. As they say aloud what they have written, invite the children to respond "Yes!"

C *Simply put, some children are introverts. For them, it isn't a matter of being shy, not understanding something, or being afraid; they are uncomfortable. Making your group a safe place will help these children find their voice. Encourage other children to be patient.*

Sequence of events:

- Jesus' entry into Jerusalem
- Jesus' trial with Pilate
- the women at the foot of the cross
- Jesus' death on the cross
- Jesus' body wrapped in cloths
- the sealed tomb

Celebrating God's Grace C

Form pairs. Give each child a copy of **GN 2**. Have the children cut apart the cards and place the story in the correct sequence of events. Suggest they work independently and then compare with their partner as they re-tell the story to each other, adjusting any squares if necessary.

Then tell the children to collect their story squares, mix them up, and race their partner to put them back in the correct order.

Encourage the children to take their story squares home, tell someone that they live with the story they heard today, and then invite that person to place the story squares in sequence too.



Praying God's Grace



Play "Prayer Music"—**MM 31**. Hand out copies of **GN 3** and invite children to pray as they color and to talk in their hearts to God about Jesus dying on the cross. Encourage them to ask God questions (even if they don't hear answers immediately), to talk to God about what it means to them that Jesus died, and anything else they would like to pray about.

Extra Activity



Reread the first paragraph in the second column on **SCM 4**, beginning with, "The Bible tells us. . . ." Distribute copies of **GN 4** and ask what else the soldier might be thinking about.

Invite the children to complete the maze. When they have solved the maze, allow time to color the soldier. Encourage the children to tell their family about today's story.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite children to gather, and lead them in cleaning up the worship space.

Encourage them to participate in any Holy Week services that may be happening in your community this week and to join you to celebrate Easter next Sunday. Remind them of the journey from the joy of Palm Sunday to the despair of Jesus' death, but assure them that despair is not the end of the story!

Close in prayer together and offer this blessing after you pray, "Go in grace and gratitude for Jesus' love for us and for God's power over death. Amen."









