Isaiah Predicts Future King Will Descend from Household of Jesse

JERUSALEM, 8th Century, BCE—The prophet Isaiah spoke out today in the streets of Jerusalem, urging government officials, especially King Ahaz, to listen to what he has to say. Recently, Isaiah has been focusing his remarks at the king, hoping to influence foreign policy regarding the Assyrians.

Today's speech took a different turn. This time, the prophet predicted a new leader would soon be born.

He said, "A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. "The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord."

Students of history will recognize the references to Jesse. He lived in Bethlehem, and he was the father of our beloved and great King David.

Isaiah declared that this future ruler will be just, righteous, and faithful. He will see that the poor are cared for, that the meek will be treated fairly, and that the wicked will die.

A Child Called Immanuel

In a colorful and profound vision, Isaiah spoke of a peaceful land where enemies would live together. Then he added this curious comment: "... and a little child shall lead them."

Those who listened carefully believe the "child" will be a descendant of the royal family of David and Solomon.

In previous speeches, Isaiah predicted that the child will be named Immanuel (which means "God is with us"). Under the leadership of this ruler, "... there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom."

Several of Isaiah's followers believe he is referring to the Messiah, the long awaited savior of Israel. This person will restore the glory of the nation. He will reunite the southern and northern kingdoms as they were under David.

Inside: How artists make stained glass windows, page 2.
Cathedral Windows Told Stories

The painting on Page I of this newspaper shows part of a Jesse Tree. This illustration was inspired by an actual window located in the Chartres Cathedral, France. Stained glass windows are a distinctly Christian art form. They are pictures composed with pieces of painted glass. To make one is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle.

First, the artist sketches a design on paper, indicating shapes and colors to be used. Pieces of glass are then painted and cut in matching sizes. Sometimes details are added to the pieces by using iron or copper filings. When the design is completed, the pieces of glass are fired in a kiln to fuse the paint to the glass.

Pieces are then spread out on a table to compose the original design. Strips of lead are formed around each glass shape to fit the pieces together.

When the assembly is finished, the joints are soldered together and cemented with a special cement to waterproof the completed window. Finally, it is framed with metal, stone, or wood.

Stained glass art reached its peak during the Middle Ages when many beautifully designed Gothic cathedrals were being built.

During this time, most people did not read, and church services were said in Latin, which was not widely understood.

So the stories of our faith were told through these lovely windows.

Worshipers and visitors in the cathedrals could learn about the people of God by peering at scenes from the Hebrew Scriptures, along with pictures of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Other windows represented saints and martyrs.

Artist Focused on Peaceable Kingdom

Edward Hicks was a nineteenth-century country preacher in Pennsylvania. He belonged to the Society of Friends (Quakers). The vision of peace found in Isaiah 11:6 became the main theme of his life and preaching.

He believed so strongly in this vision that he decided to share it with his family and friends through art. We remember him best for the scenes he produced with the title, "The Peaceable Kingdom." Between 1820 and 1849, he painted more than a hundred versions of this scene.
Church Year Begins with Advent

The first season of the Church Year is Advent. It begins four Sundays before Christmas Day.

Advent means “coming.” During this period, Christians prepare for the coming of Jesus, the rebirth of the Christ Child in our hearts.

The color for Advent can be purple, to suggest a penitential time when God’s people examine their lives and seek forgiveness. (The Church’s greatest season of penitence is Lent. Advent has sometimes been called a “little Lent.”)

Some churches use blue during Advent. That is the color associated with Mary, Jesus’ mother. During Advent we remember especially Mary’s preparation for the birth of God’s Son.

A popular practice in Advent is the use of a calendar containing windows, one of which is opened each day, revealing a figure or a Scripture verse.

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**MEMORY CHALLENGE**

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**Psalm 121**

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?

2. My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

3. He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

4. He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5. The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

6. The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7. The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

8. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.
Word Search: The Peaceable Kingdom

Directions: Important words from the Bible are hidden in the puzzle. They may be forward or backward, horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. Circle each word as you find it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHOOT</th>
<th>STUMP</th>
<th>JESSE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRANCH</td>
<td>ROOTS</td>
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<td>MOUNTAIN</td>
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<td>FAITHFULNESS</td>
<td>LAMB</td>
<td>LEOPARD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session 1: Isaiah 11:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27
Session 2: Matthew 3:2; Matthew 3:4
Session 3: Matthew 1:20b; Matthew 1:21
Session 4: John 1:1; John 1:5; John 12:36
Session 5: Luke 2:29 (RSV); Luke 2:40
Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

LEARNING SCRIPTURE

Session 1

"The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." —Isaiah 11:6 (NRSV)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." —Matthew 5:9 (NRSV)

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." —John 14:27 (NRSV)
John, Son of Zechariah, Baptizing Many People in the Jordan River

JUDEA, around 24 CE—A popular preacher named John has been baptizing large numbers of people in the Jordan River.

Members of the family say that Elizabeth was fairly old when she learned she would have a child. We're told that Zechariah was so overwhelmed by the news that he could not speak for the entire nine months of her pregnancy. It is a mystery as to why the child was named John, for there is no one else in the family with that name.

Nothing is known of John's childhood or youth. He has just recently emerged from the wilderness, proclaiming like a prophet from God, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Unusual Appearance

Those who have seen John say he is easy to recognize wherever he goes. He wears clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He claims to eat only locusts and wild honey.

John speaks frankly and openly about the need for people to confess their sins and be cleansed in the waters of the Jordan. He is a man with a mission as he calls people day after day to turn away from evil and seek God.

This prophet seems convinced that the Messiah is coming soon to baptize those who are prepared with the Spirit of God. Those who follow John have insisted that "this is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight . . . .'"
Advent Wreath Is an Honored Tradition

We do not know when the first Advent wreath was introduced. It may have been in France or Germany. Today it can be found in churches all over the world.

The wreath is usually in the form of a circle, to symbolize the unending love of God. Typically, evergreens surround a base that supports four candles. One candle is freshly lit each Sunday during Advent. Sometimes, a fifth candle is added at Christmas. This “Christ Candle” is always white.

The other four candles may be white, purple, or blue. Sometimes a pink one is used on the third Sunday, as the candle of joy.

Varied traditions surround the Advent wreath. Prayers are said and Scripture passages read as families gather around the wreath during Advent.

Advent hymns may be sung. Sometimes other inspiring passages or legends of the season are shared. Because of the growing popularity of Advent celebrations, many books and guides are being published to help churches and families plan their own versions.

Was John the Baptist an Essene?

The discovery of ancient Hebrew scrolls in this century has led scholars to speculate about a possible connection between John the Baptist and a group called the Essenes.

The Essenes were a monastic community at Qumran—the original keepers of the writings now known as the Dead Sea scrolls. They were found in caves in the Holy Land in the late 1940s.

Essenes followed a life of purity and holiness in their desert home. They observed strict discipline and shared in a sacred meal. It seems possible that the lifestyle of these people would have attracted John. In order to join their group, a man must belong to a priestly order. Since John was from a family of priests, he met this qualification.
Repentance

In the time of John the Baptist, the ritual of baptism was open to people who wanted to "turn around" from sin to a new life. To be baptized was to be washed clean of sin, following repentance.

When Jesus came to John for baptism, John protested that he could not do it. Surely Jesus had no sin to confess. But Jesus insisted.

When John did baptize Jesus, the foundation was laid for practicing baptism in the early Christian church. This rite became the formal way to enter the community of believers in Jesus Christ.

Repentance means being truly sorry for something we have done against God or any of our neighbors. It is more than being sorry simply because we got caught doing something wrong. It is wanting to change our behavior so that we will not do it again.

In our public worship, we confess our sins to God, saying, "Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone."

We ask God to forgive us, and we promise to do God's will.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Psalm 121

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
2. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

3. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
4. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

5. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

7. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
8. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.
Advent Message

Directions: Circle every fourth letter, beginning with the first letter, O. Then write the circled letters in the space below to discover an important Advent message.

ONETUAWRRDASKKOEOEVSAINTTYGOTIANJINBHUDVGYSCFTAXDRVESGIA
WQOMLPNINVCYOHUBWCFTJDRDXRWERTREWPOSIIUYNRTYEUGHJL
MRASDCMLKONKUMDSAEHNMLTHEEWERTNOMUVGYSCFTADGDL
ONHGREEREHNOHMEMIEREM.

Unit II:
LEARNING SCRIPTURE
Session 1: Isaiah 11:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27
Session 2: Matthew 3:2; Matthew 3:4
Session 3: Matthew 1:20b; Matthew 1:21
Session 4: John 1:1; John 1:5; John 12:36
Session 5: Luke 2:29 (RSV); Luke 2:40
Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:2; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

LEARNING SCRIPTURE

Session 2

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."
—Matthew 3:2 (NRSV)

"Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey."
—Matthew 3:4 (NRSV)
Not wanting to expose her to public disgrace, he seriously thought about putting her away informally and dissolving the marriage promise.

Joseph withdrew for several days while he considered what course he would take.

Not wanting to expose her to public disgrace, he seriously thought about putting her away informally and dissolving the marriage promise.

**Son to be Named Jesus**

Joseph reported that just when he had resolved to dismiss Mary quietly, he had an unusual dream.

He said, "An angel of the Lord came to me in the dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'

"The angel said the child will be a boy. We are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

"All this will take place to fulfill what the prophet has said, 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us.'"
Marriage Different in Biblical Times

Marriage in the time of Mary and Joseph was very different from marriages of today. People did not date, fall in love, and decide to get married.

In first-century Palestine, most marriages were arranged by the families involved. Usually the fathers agreed on the financial terms—an amount that compensated the bride’s father for the loss of his daughter.

Once all the arrangements were finalized, the groom presented gifts to the bride’s family. The couple were now considered engaged or betrothed. This was legally binding. If the promise was broken, the responsible party would pay a penalty.

The engagement usually lasted a year. During this time, the couple were not to have sexual relations. They were not yet “married.” However, a divorce, or dissolution of the legal agreement, could happen during this period.

It was during her betrothal to Joseph that Mary became pregnant with Jesus. Because of this, Joseph had the right to ask for a divorce. The situation could have led to a stoning of the woman.

It is assumed that a wedding ceremony eventually took place between Mary and Joseph, although we are told it did not happen until after the birth of Jesus.

Dreams Bring God’s Messages

Dreams had a large influence on people of the Bible. Foreign rulers sometimes called on Hebrew persons to interpret dreams that predicted the future.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, it is clear that individuals like Abraham and Jacob believed their dreams to be messages directly from God. For example, Abraham had a dream containing the direct promise of future descendants.

Other dreams seemed to involve complicated symbols. They needed to be explained. Joseph, son of Jacob, interpreted an important dream for the Egyptian Pharaoh. Centuries later, the prophet Daniel was called upon to interpret a king’s serious dreams.

In the pages of the New Testament, Joseph was the first to receive messages from God through dreams. The initial dream in the Gospel of Matthew told him to take Mary as his wife. A second dream warned him to leave Bethlehem and go to Egypt. A third told Joseph when it was time to return home to Nazareth.

The Collect for St. Joseph

O God, who from the family of your servant David raised up Joseph to be the guardian of your incarnate Son and the spouse of his virgin mother: Give us grace to imitate his uprightness of life and his obedience to your commands; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p. 239

The Church Honors St. Joseph

March 19 is the day set aside in the Church’s calendar to celebrate the life of Joseph, husband of Mary and adopted father of Jesus.

Joseph was probably responsible for teaching Jesus the carpenter’s trade and for raising him in the Jewish tradition. It may be the affection that Jesus felt for Joseph that led him to refer to God as “abba,” a very endearing form of “father” (something like our own use of “daddy”).
JOSEPH, Continued from page 1

“When I awoke from my dream, I went straight to Mary’s house and told her what had happened. I will take her as my wife without any doubts that this is God’s will.”

Several friends have confirmed that Joseph will surely keep his word. They also said that, Joseph is a very righteous man. Because he is descended from the family of King David, he believes strongly in the will of God and in the prophecy of a Messiah, a savior of the Hebrew people.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Psalm 121

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?
2. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
3. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
4. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
5. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
7. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
8. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Cross Year-Intermediate, Episcopal Children’s Curriculum
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Joseph's Dream

Directions: Place each action word from Joseph's dream in the appropriate space. Some letters have been provided for you.

Unit II:
LEARNING SCRIPTURE

Session 1: Isaiah 11:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27
Session 2: Matthew 3:2; Matthew 3:4
Session 3: Matthew 1:20b; Matthew 1:21
Session 4: John 1:1; John 1:5; John 12:36
Session 5: Luke 2:29 (RSV); Luke 2:40
Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

LEARNING SCRIPTURE

Session 3

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."
—Matthew 1:20b (NRSV)

"She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
—Matthew 1:21 (NRSV)
Mary and Joseph Give the Name Jesus to Child Born in Bethlehem

BETHELHEM, around 6 BCE—Eight days ago, as this city was overcrowded at census-taking time, a child was born in a stable near a local inn. The first-time parents are Mary and Joseph, of Nazareth. Today they announced that their son will be called Jesus.

For weeks now, people have been coming here to be registered according to the decree sent out by the Emperor Augustus. Mary and Joseph were among those who were told to return to the city of their ancestor David. They decided to make the trip even though the birth of the baby could happen at any time.

The couple arrived just in time, for the baby was born the very night they arrived. Unfortunately, there were no accommodations. The inn owner offered them shelter in a cave outside the city, where the child was delivered.

Several persons reported unusual occurrences on that night. One servant said she saw a single bright star shining directly over the stable.

A group of shepherds tending their flocks in the hills declared they had seen angels in the sky and heard them sing praises to God. They claimed the angels told them to come to Bethlehem where they would find a baby in a manger.

While no one understands the significance of the child’s birth here, both citizens and visitors agree he must be important. They have asked one another, “Who is this baby? Is he a descendant of royalty?”

Name Came from Angels

Today, according to Jewish custom, the boy was circumcised and given his name by his father. He will be called Jesus, a name which means “God will save.”

When asked why they chose to call their son Jesus, the parents said, “That is the name the angels told us to give him.”

We also questioned Joseph, the child’s father, about future plans. He told us, “We will be taking our son to the temple in Jerusalem for the time of purification of his mother and his dedication as the firstborn male of this family. After that we will return to Nazareth where I will resume my trade as carpenter.” When asked about his family background, Joseph confirmed that he is from the family of David but offered no further explanation.
Magi Traveled to Visit the Holy Family

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke offer separate accounts of the birth of Jesus. Mark’s Gospel makes no mention of Jesus’ Nativity. The Gospel of John describes the birth as “the Word” from God that became flesh and entered into the world.

Luke’s version gives us the familiar story of the baby born in a stable and laid in a manger. Angels filled the sky with hymns of glory as shepherds learned of the birth.

In Matthew, we hear of Joseph’s dream concerning the miraculous birth. Here also we find the story of the Wise Men from the east who followed a star to the place where Mary and Joseph were staying.

The visit of the Wise Men may have happened up to three years after the birth. By this time, Mary and Joseph occupied a house. We are not told how many wise men were in the party, but tradition has it that they were three: one black, probably from Arabia, one Oriental from the Orient, and one white from Mesopotamia.

The three gifts they brought are symbols of the life and ministry of God’s Son. Gold represented wealth, honor, and royalty. Frankincense, a fragrant gum resin, was used in worship and stood for the holy. Myrrh was the ointment used in embalming and symbolized the death of Jesus.

A dream warned the Wise Men of betrayal by King Herod, whom they had visited earlier in Jerusalem to ask where the child had been born. Because of the dream, they departed for their homes by a different way.

Was There a Star of Bethlehem?

Matthew tells us of a bright star that led the Wise Men to Bethlehem to visit the Christ Child. Astronomers, scientists who study the stars have studied the sky charts for many years to account for the presence of such a star in the heavens.

Most astronomers today believe that the famous star of Bethlehem was not a star as we now define it, but a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, that would have resulted in an unusually bright light in the sky at the time of Jesus’ birth.
Holy Name Day

January 1 is set aside, in the Church’s Calendar, as a day to celebrate The Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This is eight days after Christmas Day, in accordance with the Scriptural account of Jesus’ being circumcised and named “on the eighth day.”

The following prayer is designated for this feast day:

Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p. 213

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Psalm 121

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
2. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
3. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
4. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
5. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
7. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
8. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Some of the Names for Jesus

MESSIAH
SON OF DAVID
SON OF GOD
CHRIST
WORD (LOGOS)
THE GOOD SHEPHERD
KING
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD
THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE
THE VINE
IMMANUEL
EMMANUEL

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Page 3
The Birth of Jesus

Directions: Using the clues below, fill in the answers of the word puzzle. The letters in the boxes form a word that means the title of this puzzle.

Clues:
1. The shepherds were told about the baby by ________.
2. Jesus was born in a ________, a place for animals.
3. Mary and Joseph had to return to ________ because of a decree by Emperor Caesar Augustus.
4. The ________ was wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger.
5. He is called Jesus, a name which means ________.
6. It is a Jewish custom to have a male child ________.
7. A ________ shone over the place where Jesus was born.
8. ________ was the mother of Jesus.

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________
5. ____________________________
6. ____________________________
7. ____________________________
8. ____________________________

Unit II:
LEARNING SCRIPTURE
Session 1: Isaiah 11:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27
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Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

LEARNING SCRIPTURE

Session 4

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” —John 1:1 (NRSV)

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” —John 1:5 (NRSV)

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” —John 12:36 (NRSV)
Aging Temple Visitors Say They Have Seen the Messiah from God

JERUSALEM, about 6 BCE—Quite a stir occurred in the holy temple of the Jews today as a young couple brought their firstborn son to be dedicated according to the law. During the visit, a devout man named Simeon and a prophet named Anna declared the child to be the long-awaited Messiah.

The couple, Mary and Joseph, descendants of the family of King David, residents of Nazareth, arrived quietly this morning for the ritual purification rites of the mother and the dedication of the child.

The family had come to present a sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves and to designate the baby as holy to the Lord. As they were preparing to do what is customary by law, the righteous and devout Simeon approached them.

Now well advanced in years, Simeon is reported to have received a vision assuring him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

Predictions About Jesus

Witnesses said Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

Simeon then blessed the child. Afterwards he turned to Mary, the mother, and said, “This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Soon afterward, Anna—who has been in the temple, fasting and praying night and day for as long as people can remember—came up to the child. When she looked upon the baby boy, Anna also began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Mary and Joseph, clearly shaken by these proclamations about their child, quickly disappeared from the temple and the city.
Epiphany is also known as the Feast of Lights and is a more important festival than Christmas in some places.

Epiphany Recalls Visit of Wise Men

The Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 each year. It is linked in tradition with the visit of the Wise Men.

Many churches have Epiphany pageants that celebrate this event as the revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles. The Wise Men were assumed to be non-Jewish, because they did not know the prophecy of Micah, that the new King of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem.

Epiphany is also known as the Feast of Lights and is a more important festival than Christmas in some places. In Spain, for example, gifts are given on the Feast of the Epiphany rather than at Christmas. During this celebration, costumed riders representing the Wise Men travel through towns and villages distributing presents to children.

The night before Epiphany is Twelfth Night, the end of the “twelve days of Christmas.” In some communities, people gather to burn the Christmas greens, letting the smoke rise to God in a form of prayer. Afterward, food, music, and dancing are enjoyed as part of the celebration.

The Feast of the Epiphany also marks the beginning of the season of Epiphany. During these weeks, lessons are read from the Gospels that tell us about Jesus’ “showing forth” to the world. The season always begins with Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan River and ends with the story of the Transfiguration (Jesus’ visit to the mountain top with Peter, James, and John).

Birth Customs in Judaism

The firstborn of a Hebrew household was cherished by the whole family, particularly if the child was a male. It was the custom for male children to inherit the rights and privileges of their fathers.

We know from the story of Jacob and Esau that the birthright (including the blessing of the father upon the firstborn), was extremely important.

When a baby was born, the body was rubbed with olive oil and salt to tighten and firm the skin. Parents believed that this would make the child healthy and strong.

At eight days, the child was named. After about a month, the infant was redeemed or dedicated to God.

Babies were breast-fed until they were two or sometimes three years old. This kept them close to home where they learned much from their mothers.

As soon as they were old enough, boys were taught by their fathers to follow the family trade. The father also taught the family the traditions of the Hebrew household.

Candlemas Has Special Meaning

The feast known as Candlemas is also known as the Purification of the Saint Mary the Virgin. In The Book of Common Prayer, the day is named “The Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple,” to be celebrated on February 2.

For Christians, this special presentation of the Christ Child at the temple was very different from the old ideas of sacrifice and introduced a new and perfect offering to the Lord.

Traditionally, candles have been blessed at this feast. Lighted tapers are used in processions at this service.
The Song of Simeon

The Song of Simeon is also known as the *Nunc dimittis* (Latin for “Now let depart”). It is included in Morning and Evening Prayer as a Canticle to be said or sung between the Scripture readings.

The Song has a special place at Compline, a late evening service, where it concludes the service. There it is framed by the Antiphon, “Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.”

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.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p.135

### MEMORY CHALLENGE

**Psalm 121**

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
2. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
3. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
4. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
5. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
7. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
8. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Answers:
1. dedicate
2. male, Lord
3. turtledoves
4. righteous
5. spirit
6. held
7. servant
8. thoughts
9. pierce
10. prophet

Jesus was born to bring salvation to the people.
The Presentation

Directions: Write the appropriate word in each blank. Then write the numbered letters in the corresponding spaces below to complete the statement.

1. Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to __________ _______ _______ _______ _______ him to the Lord.

2. Every firstborn _______ _______ _______ was holy to the _______ _______.

3. _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ ____

Unit II:
LEARNING SCRIPTURE
Session 1: Isaiah 11:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27
Session 2: Matthew 3:2; Matthew 3:4
Session 3: Matthew 1:20b; Matthew 1:21
Session 4: John 1:1; John 1:5; John 12:36
Session 5: Luke 2:29 (RSV); Luke 2:40
Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

Session 5

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; ..." —Luke 2:29 (RSV)

"The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." —Luke 2:40 (NRSV)
Leader of Pharisees Pays Visit Late at Night to Ask a Question

JERUSALEM, about 24 CE—Late last night, Nicodemus—a leader of the Pharisees, a member of the Sanhedrin, and a rabbi—was seen coming out of the place where Jesus of Nazareth is staying in the city.

We arranged for an interview with Nicodemus to ask him about his unusual encounter at that time of day.

He was surprised that he had been seen visiting the controversial rabbi from Galilee. He did not deny having seen Jesus and was very frank about what occurred.

“I went there in the night, to avoid attracting attention from the other leaders of Judaism who are opposed to Jesus’ teaching. I am more moderate in my views and wanted to hear what the rabbi had to say about a specific question.

“I also chose nighttime because I would have more of a chance to talk to Jesus alone. He is surrounded by crowds during the day, and it is difficult to speak with him in private.”

Jesus of Nazareth has been in the news lately for his dramatic display of anger in the temple as he overturned tables and forced the money changers to leave their places of business. He was heard to shout, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

We asked Nicodemus if this was why he had gone to see the teacher. Did he try to get Jesus to stop such actions?

He answered firmly, “I did not try to stop Jesus or influence his actions regarding the temple incident. In fact, I agree with him.

“I told him that I believed that he has come from God, for no one can do what he has done without God.”

Jesus’ Reply Is Puzzling

Nicodemus continued, “Jesus’ reply is a puzzle to me. He said, ‘No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’

“I asked him how someone as old as I am can return to my mother’s womb and be born again. Jesus responded to my question in a slightly different way.

“He said, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.’

“Then he told me not to be astonished by what he said and spoke of the wind blowing wherever it chooses. No one

Continued on page 3
The Spirit Brings Rebirth

In the famous interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus are the beginnings of the concept of Holy Baptism as rebirth.

In *John 1:29-34*, John the Baptist testifies that he saw the Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove and declares him to be the Son of God.

The other three Gospels also record the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus as he emerged from the waters of the Jordan after being baptized by John.

As Christians, we speak of being born of water and the Spirit. At our baptisms, we become children of God and members of the body of Christ.

Who Were the Pharisees?

The Pharisees were a strict Jewish religious sect numbering about 6,000 during the time of Jesus. They believed in very close observance of the Law and established rules elaborating on all its details.

Many Jews found that keeping all of these rules was impossible. For the Pharisees, not keeping the rules meant that one was a sinner.

Jesus was often in conflict with the Pharisees, arguing with them over the interpretation of Jewish law. One noted conflict was over whether it was legal to heal people on the Sabbath.

Most of the Pharisees were ordinary people who kept the Jewish laws. Two famous Pharisees who became followers of Jesus were Nicodemus and Paul.

A smaller Jewish sect in Jerusalem were the Sadducees. While lesser in number, they held more power because they were members of the aristocracy—the most wealthy and powerful among the people.

The Sadducees believed in the strict interpretation of the Jewish law only as it was written. They opposed the Pharisees' oral interpretation and expansion of the rules.

The Sanhedrin Enforced the Law

The temple in Jerusalem required thousands of people to run it on a daily basis. During the time of a major feast such as Passover, the number reached over 15,000 priests alone.

The high priest had the most authority. As the leader of the Jewish people, he was the head of the Sanhedrin, the high court. The Sanhedrin was made up of 70 or more priests, scribes, and some laymen.

The Sanhedrin played a large role in the justice system of the Jewish people. All disputes regarding religion and legal properties were brought before this council of elders.

Many scribes or lawyers were necessary for the administration of the temple. They recorded the proceedings of the Sanhedrin and served as interpreters of the Law of Moses. Many of the scribes belonged to the party of the Pharisees.
knows where wind comes from or where it goes. He said it is the same with people who are born of the Spirit.

"I was still confused and asked, 'How can these things be?' He then told me many more things that I am not yet ready to talk about. I must think them over as I study the Torah.

"This Jesus of Nazareth truly is a teacher who has come from God, but I need more time to consider all that he has told me."

Nicodemus refused to answer any more questions, especially concerning what he would tell other Pharisees and members of the Sanhedrin about his visit.

Many wonder about the true purpose of this late night conversation. Did leaders who are opposed to Jesus send this man as a spy? Or might Nicodemus himself become a disciple of Jesus?

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**MEMORY CHALLENGE**

**Summary of the Law**

[Jesus] said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

—Matthew 22:37-40 (RSV)
Unit II: LEARNING SCRIPTURE

Session 1: Isaiah 11:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27
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Session 5: Luke 2:29 (RSV); Luke 2:40
Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

Session 6

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” —John 3:8a (NRSV)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” —John 3:16 (NRSV)
Jesus Tells Disciples to Change And Be as Humble as Children

CAPERNAUM, about 25 CE—While preaching to a group of his followers in the village square yesterday, Jesus was asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Jesus continued by telling the crowd that they must take care of the children at all costs.

Disciples Argue

The disciples have been overheard arguing about their own places in heaven. They seem to think they deserve special honor because they have left everything and followed Jesus. Lately, they seem a bit upset.

One of them told us, “Jesus continues to give us the message that we are not all that important in relation to all of God’s creation. He wants us to concentrate on how we serve God and others.

“Some of us just don’t get it. Two disciples who are brothers are always asking for special privileges. I just say that Jesus is very fair to all of us.”

We asked if this incident with the child was something new. The disciple replied, “Jesus has blessed the children many times. One day there was a large crowd of people gathered around him. Several of the mothers were pushing through the people who were talking to Jesus.

“Several of the disciples tried to stop these women. After all, Jesus was talking about important things. When he realized what was going on, he said clearly, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’

“Jesus spent the rest of the afternoon laying his hands on the children and blessing them.”
Children Honored by Jesus

Children were highly valued by the Jewish people. The more children they had, the more they felt blessed by God. In contrast, persons without children were thought to be suffering punishment.

At the same time, children were also considered to be the property of their parents. They had no rights of their own. They were to be obedient to their parents, especially their fathers who were the heads of the households.

The children who were being brought to Jesus by their mothers, therefore, would have been thought to be seeking a place above their male elders. Thus the disciples wished to keep them away from what was not their place.

Jesus reversed this way of thinking. He put a child in the middle of the disciples and told them how important children are in the eyes of God.

Children’s Activities

Jewish children of Biblical times participated in the daily routines of doing chores. Boys learned their fathers’ trades, and girls were taught how to manage their homes.

Children have always played. New Testament children probably played running games and ball games outdoors and board games similar to checkers indoors. They may also have had pets, such as goats, sheep, and puppies, although dogs were not well regarded.

Archaeologists have found dolls, whistles, rattles, and small clay animals that children may have had for toys.

The Bible offers hints of a children’s roleplaying game in which they imitated the adult rituals of weddings and funerals.

Children Today Have Easier Life

Young persons of today have an easier life than children in ancient times. For one thing, they are healthier. Because of diseases, many children in Jesus’ day did not live to become adults.

Children of today also have more time to play and to go to school. Hebrew boys attended school only part of the day and worked at learning a trade the rest of the time.

Hebrew girls stayed at home and helped their mothers. Anything they knew about reading and Scripture was learned from their mothers.

Children did not participate in the religious services although they did enjoy the festival celebrations. Boys were allowed in the temple after they were twelve or thirteen. Girls were never allowed.

Boys and girls today have many more opportunities for worshipping God in church with their families. Many serve as acolytes, greeters, and members of the choir.
A Prayer for Children

Into your hands, O God, we place your children. Support them in their successes and in their failures, in their joys and in their sorrows. As they grow in age, may they grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p.444
(adapted)

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Summary of the Law

[Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

—Matthew 22:37-40 (NRSV)
Children of God

A desirable characteristic of children is

Directions: Using the clues below, write the correct words in the numbered boxes. Then complete the final statement by writing the letters from the shaded boxes in the appropriate spaces.

Clues:

"At that time, the 6.________ came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the 7.________ in the 4.________ of heaven? . . . "8.________ I tell you, 2.________ you change and become like 1.________, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . Whoever 5.________ one such child in my 3.________ welcomes me."

Unit II: LEARNING SCRIPTURE
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Session 2: Matthew 3:2; Matthew 3:4
Session 3: Matthew 1:20b; Matthew 1:21
Session 4: John 1:1; John 1:5; John 12:36
Session 5: Luke 2:29 (RSV); Luke 2:40
Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

LEARNING SCRIPTURE
Session 7

". . . Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."—Matthew 18:3 (RSV)

"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."
—Matthew 18:5 (RSV)

". . . Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."
—Matthew 19:14 (RSV)
Beggar Receives Part of a Cloak As a Gift From a Roman Soldier

AMIENS, Gaul, 4th century CE—Yesterday, a soldier from the Roman legion station in Gaul was riding through the city when he encountered a beggar. The soldier stopped and used his sword to cut his own woolen mantle in two. He then gave half of it to the beggar.

This action has created quite a stir in the town. Most people, especially the Roman soldiers, ignore the beggars who line the city streets.

We visited the legion campgrounds and spoke to the young soldier, who has been identified as Martin of Tours.

Martin told us what had happened.

“It was a very cold day. The snow had been falling for some time. The cold wind was chilling. As I was riding through the town on my way back to camp, I saw this beggar by the road.

“He was shivering because all he had were thin rags that were already wet and frozen. I didn’t stop to think about it. I just knew what I had to do. I took my warm cloak from my shoulders and cut it with my sword.

“I gave the piece to the beggar and went on my way.”

When asked why a Roman soldier would show such compassion for an ordinary beggar, Martin replied, “No one is ordinary in the eyes of God. You see, I hope to become a Christian, and I have been studying the words of Jesus.

“Just a few days ago I read in the Scriptures from the Gospel of Luke: ‘Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.’

“I know I did what Christ Jesus would want me to do. Last night I had a dream. I saw Jesus seated on a throne and wearing the half-cloak I had given the beggar. He was saying, ‘See what young Martin has given me.’

“I remembered then that Jesus said, ‘Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.’”

The young soldier seemed sincere. This behavior is not unusual for Christians, although it is surely unexpected from members of the Roman military forces.
Martin of Tours Became a Bishop

Martin grew up in a Roman family in the fourth century. His family was loyal to the Roman gods. While still a child, Martin learned about Jesus Christ and Christianity from the slaves in his father’s house.

He wanted to become a Christian, but his father commanded him to join the Roman legion. At fifteen, he became a soldier in the Roman army.

While stationed in Gaul, he encountered the beggar and had his vision of Christ. The dream made him more eager than ever to become a Christian.

At eighteen, Martin was baptized. He remained in the army for a little while, but he left to become a monk as soon as it was possible.

Bishop Hilary, the Bishop of Poitiers in France, helped Martin to establish a religious community near Tours, where he was dearly loved by the people.

When the office of Bishop of Tours became vacant, the people planned in secret to elect Martin. They did not want him to know, because they were sure he would refuse them, preferring to remain in the monastery.

The people succeeded, and Martin became the Bishop of Tours, in 372 CE. He lived many years serving God in the humblest of ways until he died on November 11, 397.

Young People Serve God in Many Ways

Martin of Tours was only a child when he learned about the teachings of Jesus. At fifteen, he made his decision to become a Christian. Before his baptism, he spent three years of study as a “catechumen” (one who was preparing for this sacrament in the early Church).

Others, like Martin, have decided at a young age to follow Jesus. From the letters of the apostle Paul we read about John Mark and Timothy. History tells us about Catherine of Siena, Nicholas of Myra, Agnes, and Antony.

Young people today offer their many gifts and talents to God by serving in churches as acolytes, ushers, readers, and teachers’ aides.

They also participate in service projects to collect food and blankets for the homeless and the poor, clean up parks and playgrounds, visit the elderly, read stories and play games with preschoolers, and donate money they earn to missionary projects like the Church School Missionary Offering.

Many young people live the “Golden Rule” every day as they treat their families, friends, classmates, teachers, and neighbors with respect. They do this by obeying rules, helping when needed, and being loving persons.
Summary of the Law

[Jesus] said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

—Matthew 22:37-40 (NRSV)
1) Love your  
2) Do good to those  
3) Do to others  
4) Pray for those  
5) Bless those  
6) Give to everyone

A) who curse you  
B) enemies  
C) who begs from you  
D) who abuse you  
E) who hate you  
F) as you would have them do to you.

**The Golden Rule**

Directions: Match the words in the first column with words from the second column.

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**Unit II: LEARNING SCRIPTURE**

Session 1: Isaiah 11:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27
Session 2: Matthew 3:2; Matthew 3:4
Session 3: Matthew 1:20; Matthew 1:21
Session 4: John 1:1; John 1:5; John 12:36
Session 5: Luke 2:29 (RSV); Luke 2:40
Session 6: John 3:8a; John 3:16
Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

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**LEARNING SCRIPTURE**

**Session 8**

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, . . ." — *Luke 6:27* (NRSV)

"If any one strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt."

— *Luke 6:29* (NRSV)

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." — *Luke 6:31* (NRSV)
Jesus Meets Scribe’s Challenge And Stills Voices of All Critics

JERUSALEM, about 27 CE—Jesus of Nazareth has been standing up to his opposition lately with great skill and knowledge of the Scriptures.

Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees have presented him with some very tough challenges over the past few days. In fact, they seem to delight in coming up with questions they hope will trick Jesus, so they can declare him to be a blasphemer.

Today, Jesus stopped everyone from asking anything more when he gave an unexpected answer to an unexpected question.

A scribe, who had been listening in on earlier disputes, asked, “Which commandment is the first of all?”

Clearly the scribe hoped Jesus would name one of the Ten Commandments. Since all Jews believe that all ten are sacred, naming only one would be a fatal mistake for Jesus.

Two Great Commandments

The rabbi from Nazareth spoke with great conviction. He said, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

“The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

The scribe, knowing that Jesus had answered with great knowledge of the Scriptures, could only respond, “You are right.”

Indeed, the scribe was overwhelmed when Jesus looked at him and said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

No one dared to question Jesus after this. Everyone quietly walked away, pondering the exchange.

We asked another scribe why Jesus’ response silenced the crowd in this way. He told us, “All Jews know the importance of the “Shema,” which begins ‘Hear, O Israel . . .’ We recite it every day. This commandment to love God is basic to our lives.

“The second, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ is central to our religion. I believe the others were silenced because, like me, they have never heard these two moral laws put together in this way.

“Truly, this man has been taught by the very best teachers or he really is the Son of God.”
Shema is part of Jesus’ Summary of the Law

In the event described in Mark 12:28-34, Jesus combined two very important commandments of the Hebrew religion in a new way.

The first of these is called the “Shema.” That is the Hebrew word for “hear,” as in Deuteronomy 6:4, which begins, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” Jews throughout the world still recite this verse daily. In this way, they witness to the uniqueness and oneness of God.

The second commandment is from Leviticus 19:18, in a book of the law that stresses the importance of the Jewish principle of love for others.

By putting these two commandments side by side, Jesus was placing the emphasis on love—love of God and love of other human beings. If we tend to forget either of these, or if we focus on one more than the other, things get out of balance.

It is in loving God with all our being that we are able, by God’s grace, to love others and ourselves.

Hebrew Schools and Teachers

The first thing a Hebrew child learned at school was the “Shema.” Children would hear it being recited twice a day and soon learn it by heart themselves.

When young boys began formal schooling, they entered the bet hasefer, “the house of the book.” Here at the feet of a teacher, they learned the Hebrew alphabet and then words and phrases from the Torah.

At ten, a gifted boy could advance to the bet talmud, “the house of learning.” The subject matter here was the more complex oral law based on the Torah.

In this school, a teacher would begin by asking a question. The students responded with verses from the Torah that applied. Teachings from other rabbis and learned men would then be memorized.

Such discussions could be technical, or they could be more analytical. The skill of arguing a specific point and supporting it with recognized teaching—all from memory—was highly developed in Jewish teaching.

It is no wonder that the Pharisees and Sadducees tested Jesus in the ways they did. It was the way they learned to test the Law against experience, and they were quite good at it.
Title: Hebrew Alphabet

Hebrew Alphabet

- Aleph
- Beth
- Gimel
- Daleth
- Heh
- Vav
- Zayin
- Cheth
- Teth
- Yod
- Chaph
- Chaph (end of word)
- Lamed
- Mem (end of word)
- Nun (end of word)
- Samekh
- Ayin
- Peh (end of word)
- Tsadi (end of word)
- Koph
- Resh
- Sin (end of word)
- Shin
- Thaw

Title: Memory Challenge

Summary of the Law

[Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

—Matthew 22:37-40 (NRSV)
The Law

Directions: To find the hidden message, follow each of the clues carefully.

Clues:
1. This puzzle is titled “The Law”. Cross out all the words that rhyme with law.
2. The hidden message is part of the great commandment.
   Cross out all the words that begin with “c”.
3. Jesus was asked the question, “What is the greatest commandment as a test.
   Cross out all the words that mean test.

SAW YOUXEAMSHALL
COMELOVECORT
CALENDARTHEHAW
C A T L O R D C L A W W I T H
CAREALLQUIZYOUR
DRAWHEARTJAWCAR
TRIALSOULCANDLE
STRAWMINDCANDAN
STRENGTHPAWCLU

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Session 7: Matthew 18:3; Matthew 18:5; Matthew 19:14
Session 9: Mark 12:30; John 15:12

LEARNING SCRIPTURE

Session 9

“... [Y]ou shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”
—Mark 12:30 (NRSV)

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” —John 15:12 (NRSV)