

GRADE SEVEN

JESUS AND THE GOSPEL MESSAGE



The Gospels reveal Jesus as the Savior and Risen Lord who calls us to advance the kingdom of God through discipleship.

OBJECTIVES

- To broaden the young adolescent's understanding of the Gospels through a study of their formation, themes, message, and literary aspects.
- To help the young adolescent grow in a personal relationship with Jesus by encountering him in the Gospels and learning to live his message.

I. INTRODUCTION TO SCRIPTURE

A. Revelation

Scripture, in both the Old Testament and New Testament, contains God’s self-revelation; Jesus is the fullness of that revelation. [75, 79, 108]

- God reveals himself in Scripture and invites us into a relationship of faith and love with him. [142-43]
- The Old Testament tells of God’s teachings and saving actions before the coming of Jesus. It is an indispensable part of Scripture. Through the history of the Hebrew people, God reveals himself as the one and only God. [121-23, 128-30]
- The New Testament tells of Jesus’ teachings and saving actions and the work of the Spirit in the Church. These represent the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament. [124]
- Jesus is the fullness of God’s self-revelation to us. [65]

Reading Sacred Scripture and using it for prayer can lead us to a deeper relationship with God, and thus change our lives. [104, 131-33, 141]

B. Inspiration and Authorship

Both God and human writers are truly the authors of Sacred Scripture. [105-6, 109, 135-36]

- The Holy Spirit enlightened the minds of the human authors of Scripture. This work of God is called “inspiration.” [81, 106]
- The Bible imparts religious truth about God, the world, and our relationship with God and one another. This truth is free from error. [107-8, 136]
- Understanding the various literary forms and historical contexts in which the Sacred Scriptures were written helps us to grasp the truths they contain. [110]
- Tradition and Church teaching also help us to understand what the Scriptures have to say to us today. [80-83, 85-86]

C. Stages of Gospel Formation

The entire process of Gospel formation was inspired by the Holy Spirit. [75]

The Church recognizes three stages of Tradition by which the life and teaching of Jesus have come down to us. [83, 126]

- **The Life of Jesus:** From his birth to his death and resurrection and ascension.
- **The Oral Tradition:** The period of time during which the first disciples, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gave oral witness to the life and message of Jesus.
- **The Writing of the Gospels:** The span of time in the early Christian community when the evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) put the apostolic preaching into writing.

The fourfold Gospel, according to the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is the foundation of our faith. [125, 127, 139]

Our appreciation of Scripture is enriched by Scripture scholars who work to deepen our understanding of the Word of God in accordance with the teachings of the Church. [119]

D. Literary Aspects of the Gospels

Many factors influenced the style of the different Gospels.

- The written style of each Gospel varies according to the language, background, personality and experience of the human author. [110]
- The human authors developed their themes by selecting historical details, stories and sayings from the life of Jesus. In order to interpret Scripture properly, we must always be attentive to what the human authors wanted to affirm. [109, 137]
- Each Gospel is also influenced by the needs of the community to which it is addressed. [126.3]

To convey their message, the human authors of the Gospels used various literary forms, for example:

- Narrative, such as Mark 6:53-56 and Luke 19:1-10.
- Parables, such as Mark 4:1-20.
- Passages from the Old Testament presented in a new context, such as Luke 4:16-19 and John 6:31-33.

Because the literalist and fundamentalist approaches to reading the Scriptures do not take into account either their literary form or their historical context, they are misleading. [82]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Invite the young people to reflect on the Gospels and ask them:
What Gospel story do you remember best?
What do you like about it?
How does the story make you feel: Challenged? Supported? Encouraged?
- Read John 20:30-31 to the group. Invite the young people to thank God for giving us Sacred Scripture as a true guide for life. Have them ask God for help in appreciating how the Bible leads them to know, love, and serve God better.

II. INTRODUCTION TO JESUS

In the Gospels we meet the living Jesus, a person who is fully human and fully divine. [425, 480-83, 515]

In Hebrew, the name Jesus means, “God saves.” [430]

We hear Jesus call us to be his disciples, and we learn to offer him a personal, loving response. [520-21]

Through the Gospels we encounter the Risen Lord, ever present in his Church. [639, 641, 669]

A. Jesus, Son of Mary

Jesus is fully human.

- Jesus was Jewish and was born of Mary in Palestine in the first century. Joseph was his foster father (Matthew 1:1-17; 2:1). [423, 525]
- As a human being, Jesus grew and developed naturally from childhood into adulthood, maturing physically and spiritually in age, wisdom, and grace (Luke 2:1-38; 2:39-40; 51-52). [472, 514, 518, 531]
- Jesus experienced the joys of life. He also experienced real suffering, misunderstanding and rejection (Mark 6:1-6). [461, 478, 520]

B. Jesus, Son of God

Jesus is fully divine.

- When Christians call Jesus “Lord,” we are confessing belief in his divinity.
- Jesus, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was always God (John 1:1-5, 14). [464, 479]
- In the words and actions of his life, Jesus revealed God the Father and the love that God has for us (John 14:8-10). [458-59, 516]
- Jesus is God present in our midst (Matthew 1:23, 28:20; John 20:24-31). [444-45]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Slowly read aloud Matthew 16:13-15.
- Give the young people time to silently consider how they would answer Jesus’ question: Who do people say the Son of Man is?
- Invite them to listen prayerfully as Jesus tells them who he is: John 6:35 (the Bread of Life); John 8:12 (the Light of the World); John 10:14-15 (the Good Shepherd); John 11:25 (the Resurrection and the Life).
- Have the young people conclude by speaking to Jesus about who he is in their own lives.

III. INTRODUCTION TO EACH OF THE GOSPELS

Each of the synoptic Gospels is different in the way it helps us to grow in our understanding of the mystery of Jesus. Several distinctive features of each Gospel follow.

The Gospel of Matthew

Author: Matthew, the tax collector and apostle

Date: AD 75-85

Audience: Greek-speaking Christians of Jewish descent

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is proclaimed as the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah (Matthew 2:1-12, 3:13-17, 16:16). [122, 422, 522, 1223]

Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses, bringing a new law or new commandment to the new Israel, which is the Church. Matthew gives a careful account of the teachings of Jesus and shows them to be the culmination of the Old Testament Law and the message of the Old Testament prophets (Matthew 17:1-8, 5:17). [1964, 1968-68]

Matthew's Gospel is sometimes called the "Gospel of the Church," because the community of disciples is presented as the nucleus of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:20). [541, 546, 763-64]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Invite the young people to listen to the parable that Jesus tells in Matthew 13:33.
- Explain what yeast does for bread and what bread looks and tastes like without yeast. Then have them consider why Jesus says that God's kingdom in this world is like yeast. Have them share their reflections in a way appropriate for the group.
- Jesus is inviting each of us to be like yeast in the world. Reflect prayerfully how God is at work building his kingdom in the world through you.

The Gospel of Mark

Author: John Mark of Jerusalem

Date: AD 65-75

Audience: Mostly Gentiles; those new in their faith and facing persecutions

Mark's Gospel is full of action. He emphasizes the many miracles of Jesus. Jesus in Mark's Gospel heals and casts out demons, revealing the power of God in this world. (Mark 1:32-34). [547-50]

Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of good news (Mark 1:14-15). The good news to be proclaimed is Jesus himself (Mark 1:1). [422, 425-26]

Yet, Jesus is presented as a mystery, and his disciples only come to understand him gradually. Often Jesus speaks in parables that not everyone can understand (Mark 4:11). Only when they have traveled the whole of Jesus' journey with him – including his journey to the cross (Mark 15:39) – do his disciples really come to know who he is. They then are able to proclaim him to the world (Mark 16:15). [515, 546]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Read aloud Mark 10:46-52, the story of the man born blind, in which Jesus confronts human suffering and overcomes it.

Give the young people time for silent, prayerful reflection on:

- How the blind man asked Jesus for help
- How other people treated the blind man
- How Jesus responded to the blind man
- How the blind man's whole life was changed

Remind the young people that physical healing is only one of the ways in which Jesus can heal us. Tell them we all have "blind" spots. Give them time to think about how they've been blind to the needs and concerns of others. Remind them that Jesus always wants to help us. Take time to think and then ask how they would answer Jesus' question: What do you want me to do for you?

- Invite the young people to share with the group any of their reflections on the above.
- Conclude with the following prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to understand that you want each of us to grow to our full potential. You give us your love without conditions. You give us your Holy Spirit, who enables us to respond to your love. Jesus, be the Way for us, and may the Spirit be the power enabling us to cooperate with you. Help us to listen and follow your call to grow. Amen.

The Gospel of Luke

Author: Luke, Physician and companion of Paul

Date: AD 75-85

Audience: Gentile Christians

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as our Savior (Luke 2:1-10). Through his life, death and resurrection, he helps us to overcome the evil of sin and its effects, including suffering and death. Jesus saves us especially from the evil of refusing God's love, as well as, refusing to love and forgive others. [430, 457]

Luke's gospel is called the Gospel of mercy or the Gospel of great pardons, because in it Jesus often shows compassion and forgiveness. He welcomes sinners and eats with them. The parables of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) are found in Luke's Gospel. [545, 588-89]

It is also called the Gospel of the poor, because in it Jesus' love for the poor and outcast is often expressed. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus shows that the poor and lowly are the first to whom God has revealed the birth of His Son and are given the greatest privileges (Luke 2:8-14), and Luke's account of the Beatitudes proclaims, "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours." (Luke 6:20). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus found in Luke (Luke 16:19-31) demonstrates the response called for by all disciples to meet the needs of the poor. [543-44, 2443-44, 2831]

A spirit of joy and wonder permeates Luke's gospel. More than any of the other evangelists, Luke notes the admiration of the crowds and individuals who meet Jesus. The songs (canticles) of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon are all found in Luke (Luke 1:46-55, 68-79, 2:29-32). [722, 2619, 2640]

Luke's gospel is also called the Gospel of prayer and the Holy Spirit because these themes are emphasized throughout the Gospel. At every important juncture in Jesus' life, Luke shows him at prayer and gives witness to Jesus' insistence that his disciples be people of prayer as well (Luke 11:1-13, 3:21-22, 4:1, 4:14). [728, 2600, 2759]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Ask the young people to think about some people in their lives who they have helped and who have helped them.
- Read Luke 10:25-37 to the group.
- Give them time to reflect on the scripture passage by asking them to:
 - Think about a time when you were helped by another person. How did you feel?*
 - Think about a time another person helped you when others didn't. How did you feel?*
 - Think of a time when you could have helped and failed to do so. How did you feel?*
- Encourage the young people to pray to Jesus for the grace to forgive those who have hurt them. Ask Jesus for the courage to help another person when others won't.

The Acts of the Apostles

Author: Luke, Physician and companion of Paul

Date: AD 80-90

Audience: Gentile Christians

The Acts of the Apostles, the fifth book of the New Testament, may also be described as the second volume of the Gospel of Luke. In Acts we see the fulfillment of the promises made by Jesus to the Apostles. One learns that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the salvation promised to Israel in the Old Testament has been extended to the Gentiles. In the book of Acts Luke describes the development of the early Church from the resurrection of Jesus to Paul's first imprisonment in Rome.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Read Acts 2:42-47 to the group and ask the young people to listen carefully and think about how the Church today is like the Church in the first century.
- Encourage the young people to share their reflections.
- Conclude with the following prayer:

Lord Jesus, help us as we continue the work of the Church that began many years ago. Be with us as we worship and serve you and give us the courage to proclaim the Good News to those we meet. Amen.

The Gospel of John

Author: John, son of Zebedee

Date: AD 90-100

Audience: Mixed audience; mostly Jews, some Gentiles and Samaritans

John's Gospel is the most highly symbolic of all the Gospels. Rather than expressing Jesus' teachings in parables or simple moral instructions, John offers longer passages that use symbolism. Jesus describes himself, saying "I am ... the Bread ... the Light ... the Shepherd ... the Resurrection ... the Way ... the Vine ..." (John 6:51, 9:5, 10:14, 11:25-26, 14:6, 15:5). [515-516]

Jesus' words and actions found in the Gospel of John often point to the sacramental life of the Church. For example, the water turned into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), the life-giving water that comes from Christ (John 3:5-7, 4:10-14, 7:37-38), and the bread that is his flesh (John 6:51). [1151-52, 1406, 1613, 2560-61]

In John's Gospel, many passages about Jesus unfold as dramatic dialogues between Jesus and someone else who asks a question, such as Nicodemus (John 3:1-8) or the woman at the well (John 4:7-14). In these dialogues, Jesus states a profound truth, and the other person misunderstands what he says, leading Jesus to delve more deeply into his subject. [728, 2560-61]

At the very beginning of John's Gospel, Jesus is proclaimed as the Incarnate Word of God, who existed from all eternity (John 1:1-3) and who speaks into our world the richness of the life of the Trinity (John 14:23-26). [241, 257, 458, 461]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Have the young people close their eyes, relax, and become aware of the quiet in the room. Remind them that God dwells within each person.
- Take some time to reflect on this and ask that they:
 - Think about their day so far.*
 - How has God been present in their experiences?*
 - Think about the rest of the day.*
 - Consider how it could be different if one remembers that God is within each one of us, always loving us.*
- Conclude by reading John 15:9 to them, slowly, and prayerfully.

IV. Paul – Apostle to the Gentiles

The letters of Paul to various early Christian communities are the earliest writings found in the New Testament. These letters give testimony to his encounter with the resurrected Jesus and his subsequent conversion from persecutor of Christians to a devout disciple of the crucified Christ. The influence of Paul's writing did much to shape the understanding of the faith among the early Christians.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Invite the group to listen as you pray:

Dear Jesus, help me to recognize God's presence in my day and in myself and others. Amen.