

Bible Plays for Children

Introduction

“We write this to make our joy complete.” (1 John 1:4)

The sacred stories of the Holy Scriptures are of immeasurable value. They carry the message of the Good News, that God sent his only Son into the world to be our Savior. These sacred stories contain intrinsic power within themselves to convey their message directly into the heart. Handle carefully, they are alive and give life!

Telling the sacred stories begins at home, where the child's first teacher is their parent and their first textbook is the Bible.

“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.” (Deuteronomy 11:18-21)

As the body of Christ the Church we also shoulder the responsibility of teaching these truths. In some traditions, the baptismal service includes a question to the congregation, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?” The answer is clear and strong, **"We will!"**

The sacred stories are not being told to our children. The prophet Hosea writes, *“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”* (Hosea 4:6) It is our generation that sustains the transmission of our faith and it is our responsibility to tell our children. Our Lord said, *“...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8) Our purpose is clear and our mission is right. We have been given the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us, therefore we cannot delay. Tell the Good News! The Kingdom of God is here and now! Change your mind and believe the Gospel. Amen.

Bible Plays for Children provide another way communicating the sacred stories to our children. Hearing the story or reading the text has tremendous value and should not be discounted in any way, however acting out a story takes the message even further into the heart. Children learn by imitation and are innately capable of role-play. A child with a toy truck becomes a firefighter, with a small doll assumes the role of a caregiver, or with a simple stick becomes a Major League baseball player.

Christian Education

In the time and space provided by most churches for Christian Education there is a unique opportunity to communicate with our children the sacred stories of Scripture. Within the environment of a normal classroom simple props and imagination can transport a child to the manger in Bethlehem, to the side of Jesus feeding the 5000, or to the tomb where Jesus is no longer lying, but alive again and forevermore. The capacity for learning while acting out the story cannot be overemphasized. It is a powerful teaching tool. Children learn by doing.

The Dialog

The dialog in the "Bible Plays for Children" has a dual purpose. The primary importance is to remain as close to the Scripture as possible. The reason for this is that in learning their lines of dialog the student are placing God's word in their hearts. As the psalmist writes, "*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*" (Psalms 119:11)

Later in life when the student reads the Scripture, the Holy Spirit will bring those words forward and make them alive and real. They will be able to immediately respond to the text because the Word of God, as phrased in the King James English, is "quick" or alive. "*Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*" (Hebrews 4:12)

The second purpose in the dialog is to use every day speech in the context of children. For example, "*Let us go to the house of the LORD.*" (Psalms 122:1) could be taken to a child's level of speech, "Let's go to church." There is a delicate balance in altering any words of Scripture. Remember our audience is the young child and the amazing energy of the story itself conveys its own power to communicate and transform.

If these plays are used as part of a regular Christian Education program, then a suggested learning exercise is to divide the speaking parts of the text among your students to take home for the week. The student's assignment is to read over their part of the play each day and to become familiar with their part as well as the entire story. In the relaxed environment of the home, family members can be a significant help by reading the play with the student. When the group returns to perform the play, the students will be better prepared and they will be able to hear, understand and apply the Word of God.

It is understood that you may or may not have speaking parts for all of the students, or the reverse could happen, where there might not be enough participants. Remember that having an audience is optional; everyone can be in the play. Also, multiple parts can be given to students. In these cases it is helpful to have the student try to differentiate the roles by using a different tone of voice, by their actions, or by their costume. By all means, if there is an audience of parents or younger children, explain to your acting company that they must disregard their normal speaking voice and raise the volume level, pretending to be outside speaking to someone across the playground. The audience must be able to hear. It is helpful to remind your students to face the audience when speaking. Use an open stance when actors dialog, halfway turned to each other and halfway to the audience.

Casting

The teacher is encouraged not cast parts based on gender. In all of these stories, either girl or boy can play a part. The purpose of these plays is to teach, to help the student learn the sacred story, to hear the scripture in a different way, to experience the dialog, to see the interpersonal interaction, to obtain a different viewpoint and to communicate truth on a different level than normal reading or listening. The purpose is to learn by doing. You may ask, “Can a girl play Jesus?” **Yes, absolutely!** What better way to learn about our Lord than saying His words and imitating His actions?

It is sometimes helpful, especially with short plays, to have students swap roles. It gives everyone a chance to play their favorite part and also allows others to see how imagination of voice or actions can enliven and transform a character.

Properties

Props for these plays are very simple. Remnants of colorful cloth, obtained at most fabric stores, can be used to create scarves, headdresses and other simple costumes. Scarves are made using a square of material folded in a triangle and tied under the chin. Headdress followed the same pattern as a scarf but with a small loop of rope or wire loosely fitting on top of the head. A larger square of cloth with a hole in the middle for the head to fit through can become a beautiful garment or can be used with a belt for an added place to carry a pretend sword or bag of money. The ideas for props are endless and heavily depend on the imagination of the students. For example, use a small piece of red cloth, bunched on the floor for a fire. Have the student sit around the "fire" and pretend it is very hot, holding their cold hands out to the flames to gather the warmth, rubbing them together. Keep your props in a special box, closet or place that is designated for that purpose. Opening the prop box should be an event that allows the students to enter with their imagination.

Ages

There is a suggested age group associated with each of the plays. In most cases the child should be able to read the script. For children that are not of reading age, the teacher can use these plays for storytelling. Storytelling is ageless. It is an effective tool, stimulating the imagination of the child as you build a foundation upon God’s word in their heart. All of the plays are dependent upon the teacher to first imagine the story, and then convey that image to the child. At the first of each play there is a scene summary that provides an overview of the play and is helpful in visualizing the major points of the story.

Bear in mind a worthy saying: "Keep it simple and just tell the story." Remember that the sacred story carries its own power to transform the listener.

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Example Lesson Plan

Example lesson plan using the story “[Ruth is Faithful](#)”

Open in prayer

Introductions: Teacher's name and quickly take role.

Describe the goals for this session: In this section we will be learning about Ruth and how she was faithful. Ask the students a series of questions concerning "faithful" such as 1) what does it mean, 2) give an example, 3) how are you faithful.

Read the story: The story is read from a children's Bible and the pictures are shown. As the teacher reads the story, a helper (or the teacher) writes the person's name (from the story) on the board. Note: this list will later be used to match the names of the actors to the play's characters.

Pass out the script: Go over the roles of each character. Because of the time constraints (about 30-40 minutes) this play will only focus on the first scene in the story of Ruth. The teacher will assign roles and state that these may change depending who does the best job and who would like to try for a specific role. The narrator has the largest part and could be initially played by the teacher to get things going. For this play there are the following actors.

Players

Narrator – The play’s “catechist” or teacher, should be a good reader with a clear voice.

Elimelech [E lim e leck] – The husband of Naomi. He dies in Moab.

Naomi [Na o me] – A mother figure shares the main story line with Ruth.

Ruth – Naomi’s daughter-in-law, she is central figure in the story with Naomi.

Chilion [Chill eon] – The son of Naomi. He dies in Moab.

Mahlon [May lon] – The son of Naomi. He dies in Moab.

Orpah [Ore pa] – Naomi’s daughter-in-law. She is from Moab.

Students read scene 1: This will give the students a view of what will happen. After the initial read through, ask if anyone wants to try to read that did not get a chance the first time or, depending on the size of the group, you could switch out the entire cast with new students. Repeat as necessary. Explain how it is so very important to speak with a strong voice so everyone can hear.

Blocking scene 1: The teacher will cast the initial group of actors. The "stage" area is then described to the students. In this first scene the stage is a road to Moab. On one side of the stage is their home in Moab. You will need a few props such as a bag to carry for their journey including some kitchen items such as cups or plates. Other props are optional (such as cloaks, veils, robes and headdresses) depending on the amount of time that you have. Walk through the play with the actors, showing how each part of the dialog works.

Run scene 1: Assemble the remaining students into an audience. Clear the stage. Start the action. Keep it going. Repeat with different actors.

Closure: Gather the group together and discuss how Ruth was faithful. Encourage your students to read the remainder of the story of Ruth. Ask if anyone has something they want to pray about, and then close in prayer.