

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Surprises



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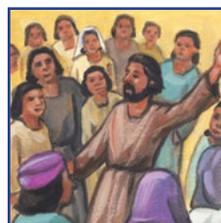
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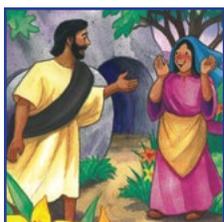
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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

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🌱 **Goal:** To experience and share the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

In Luke's telling of the Easter story, a group of women visit Jesus' tomb to anoint his body, as was their custom. Three of the women are named: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. Their task of anointing the body with herbs and ointments, however, had been put off until after the Jewish Sabbath, so it was early on Sunday morning when they were able to go. The Gospel of Matthew includes only Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" in this story; in the Gospel of Mark, it is Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. In John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene visits alone (we will explore this account in the story "Mary Finds Her Friend"). Three details consistent in all four Gospels are the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene, and the timing—the morning of the day after the Sabbath following the crucifixion.

For a brief commentary on this passage, go to bit.ly/WomenAtTheTombCommentary.

Connecting with the World

Nearly every biblical text included in this companion curriculum to *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* has a direct connection to the world around us, whether with our own community or one far away. This text, the story of the empty tomb, is very particular to the Christian faith. It is the story we tell ourselves over and over and proclaim to the world. However, as it is written in 1 Corinthians 1:22–23 (CEB): "Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." Our "proof" for this amazing tale is the word of those who have told it over and over, first by word of mouth and later in the Gospel scrolls. All we can say to the world is, "I believe."

In a world of many faiths (and not a few Christian denominations), we may speak more carefully when we tell this story, but we need not keep it quiet. The more we know about another's faith and the more they know about ours, the more fully we can inhabit this planet together.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

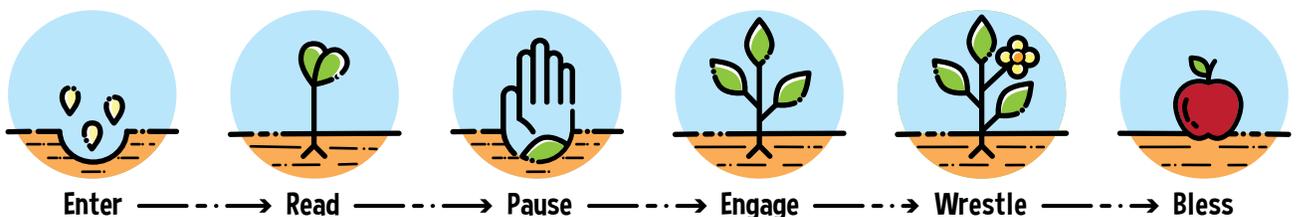
No single story in the Gospels is more important than the story of the women discovering the empty tomb, so our children need to hear it. Without the horrifying details of the crucifixion, children can learn that people who were against Jesus accused him so that he would be sentenced to death. This prepares children to take in the excitement of this day and the wonder of the women and other disciples. Many children have no problem believing this story that is often questioned by adolescents and adults; children take great joy in it. As a way to express that joy to others, teach children the traditional Easter greeting: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

Any story that is found in all four Gospels is important. Certainly, this is true of the story of the women at the empty tomb.

- 🌱 When do you remember first hearing the Easter story?
- 🌱 What questions did it raise for you as a child or adolescent?
- 🌱 What questions does it raise for you now?
- 🌱 How have you resolved these questions, if you have?
- 🌱 Where do you find joy in this story? How does it give you joy?

Loving God, we praise you. Your love for us as shown in Christ Jesus is overwhelming, as is your trust in our ability to tell this holy story. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Depending on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Floor pillows, cushions, rug squares, or beanbag chairs; small table or cloth
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Rocks (about palm sized)
- ✓ Drawing supplies, such as paper, crayons, markers, and colored pencils
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ Cinnamon stick bundle
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 2
- ✓ 6-inch squares of muslin fabric
- ✓ Fabric markers
- ✓ 12-inch lengths of ribbon or yarn
- ✓ Empty soda or soup cans
- ✓ Spices and/or herbs, such as cloves, cinnamon stick pieces, allspice, ginger, lavender, mint, rosemary, and sage

Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible, Luke 24:1–12. Then read “Women at the Tomb” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 276).

Reflect on these questions:

- ✓ What emotions does this story bring up for you? Make a chart of where the emotions arise, from the beginning to the end of this story.
- ✓ Who are the men in shiny white clothes?
- ✓ Why didn't the disciples believe the women's news about Jesus? Can you think of contemporary situations with the same dynamic?
- ✓ What questions does this Scripture bring up for you?
- ✓ What is the hardest part of this story for you to believe?
- ✓ How would you respond if someone told you the good news?

Often churches can talk about “sharing the good news” without going into too much detail. But the women who went to the tomb on that early Easter morning were taking lots of risks to tell their news. As you reflect on the courage of these women, ask yourself where you need to act with courage today. How do you feel when making a choice to share about Jesus with someone?

As you prepare for the session, recall the names and faces of the children you will teach. What do you know about them? What good news is God leading you to share with them? Pray for the children and their families. Pray for yourself, that God may guide you in sharing the good news for all who need to hear it.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with floor pillows, cushions, rug squares, or beanbag chairs in a circle. Place a small table or cloth on the floor with the candle in the center. Pile the rocks on top of each other around the candle.

Invite volunteers to read Luke 24:1–12 silently and prepare to summarize the story for the whole group.



Enter into sacred space together.

Invite the children to gather in the seating area. Welcome each child by name.

Turn on the candle. Tell the children that the candle represents God's love for us, which never goes out. Invite the children to pray with you, repeating the words after you.

God of life, /
remind us that you love us all the time. /
Show us your presence /
just as you showed the women at the tomb. /
Amen. /

Invite the children to take a rock from the center and hold on to it as you share the story.



Read a story of God's people.

Tell the children that you are going to read a story that is told every year in the church, and sometimes more than once! They may have heard this story, or they may be hearing it for the first time. Invite the children to listen to the story as if for the first time and raise their hand silently whenever they are surprised by something you read. Read “Women at the Tomb” (p. 276). As you read, raise your hand a few times to encourage the children to embrace their surprise.

Leading

Lead a conversation using the following prompts:

- ✎ When were you surprised by the story?
- ✎ When was someone in the story surprised?
- ✎ Where do you think Jesus' body went?

Invite volunteers who read the story from the Bible to share the similarities and differences they noticed between the Bible story and the adapted story in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*.



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Invite the children to hold their rock and be quiet for a few moments as they reflect on the story. Encourage them to sit in a comfortable position and focus on how their hands feel holding the rock. Suggest that they imagine they were with the women on that early Sunday morning and picked up their rock as they stood outside the empty tomb. Using their senses, what do they see, hear, smell, and feel?

After a few minutes, say "Amen" and invite the children to share any thoughts they had. Have the children place their stones around the candle again.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Encourage the children to wonder about the story. Wonder together:

- ✎ Why do you think the storyteller started by talking about plants? What does a plant life cycle have to do with Jesus?
- ✎ What happens to plants and animals when they die?
- ✎ Why do you think the disciples didn't trust the women who went to the tomb?
- ✎ How is Jesus alive today?

Choose one or both options:

- Using Senses
 - ✎ Tell the children that they are going to use their senses again but in a slightly different way. Suggest that earlier they pretended they were at the tomb using their senses to describe the scene. Encourage them now to respond to the good news that Jesus is alive. Provide copies of Resource Page 1 and drawing supplies, such as paper, crayons, markers, and colored pencils. Invite them to complete the prompts and

illustrate their answers. Assist with writing as needed.

- ✎ Have the children share their sensory poems. Display the children's papers in a place in your church where others may see them.

○ Surprise Stories

- ✎ Share stories together about times they have surprised someone. So that everyone has an opportunity to talk, show the children the bundle of cinnamon sticks you have tied together. Remind them that the women were bringing sweet smelling spices to the tomb. Use the cinnamon bundle as a "talking stick," passing it to the person who wishes to talk. Encourage the other children to ask questions to the person who is telling their story and holding the cinnamon bundle.
- ✎ Then invite the children to tell a story about a time when they were surprised with some good news. Use the cinnamon bundle again as a "talking stick." Wonder if they shared that good news with anyone else and, if so, how it felt to share their good news.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Ask the children where they see themselves in the story of the women at the tomb. Have them consider if they are one of the morning visitors (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James), the figures in shiny white clothes, the disciples, or Peter.

Choose one or both options:

- The Good News in Song
 - ✎ There are different ways to share the good news about Jesus. Watch the YouTube video "Have You Heard" (bit.ly/HaveYouHeardSong, 1:24). Play it several times, and invite the children to sing along and follow the motions.
- Two-Minute Good News
 - ✎ Form groups of two to four children with a confident reader in each group, or assist with reading as necessary. Hand out copies of Resource Page 2 to each group and invite the children to talk together about their answers to the questions. Tell the groups that they will have an opportunity to present their version of Jesus' story. Explain that they need to have each person

Leading

in the group take turns telling the story and that the whole story needs to be told in two minutes or less. Encourage the groups to practice telling their version as a story and not just as answers to questions.

- Have the groups tell their stories about Jesus. Encourage affirmation by all through applause and acclamation!



Bless one another with God's grace.

Close with the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you:

God of life, /
you were present /
with the women at the tomb /
and with the disciples /
who heard the good news. /
Help us to share the good news /
that your love is stronger than death. /
Amen. /

Encourage the children to greet their families with the “good news” when they see them.



Grow with more.

- Spices to Remember
 - Make a sachet of sweet-smelling spices and/or herbs to remember the women who first learned that Jesus was alive and told the good news to others. Provide 6-inch squares of muslin fabric and fabric markers. Invite the children to write words or draw pictures on one side of the fabric that remind them of the good news of Jesus.
 - After they are done writing or drawing, have them turn over the fabric so that the colored side is on the table. Provide a few empty soda or soup cans and pencils. Have the children trace a circle around a can in the center of their fabric. Explain that this will be where they place their spices and herbs.
 - Provide a variety of spices and/or herbs such as cloves, cinnamon stick pieces, allspice, ginger, lavender, mint, rosemary, and sage. Invite the children to choose a selection of spices and herbs that make a scent they enjoy and place them in the circle on their fabric. Encourage them to keep the ingredients in the circle so that they have plenty of room to gather the fabric.
 - Provide 12-inch lengths of ribbon or yarn. Have the children gather the edges of their fabric together, keeping the ingredients in the center. Tie ribbon or yarn around the gathered fabric, making a knot and then a bow.

Be aware of any allergies in your group. Chamomile is a common allergen that affects children with asthma, so avoid that herb.

The good news that Jesus is alive . . .



sounds like . . .



looks like . . .



smells like . . .



tastes like . . .

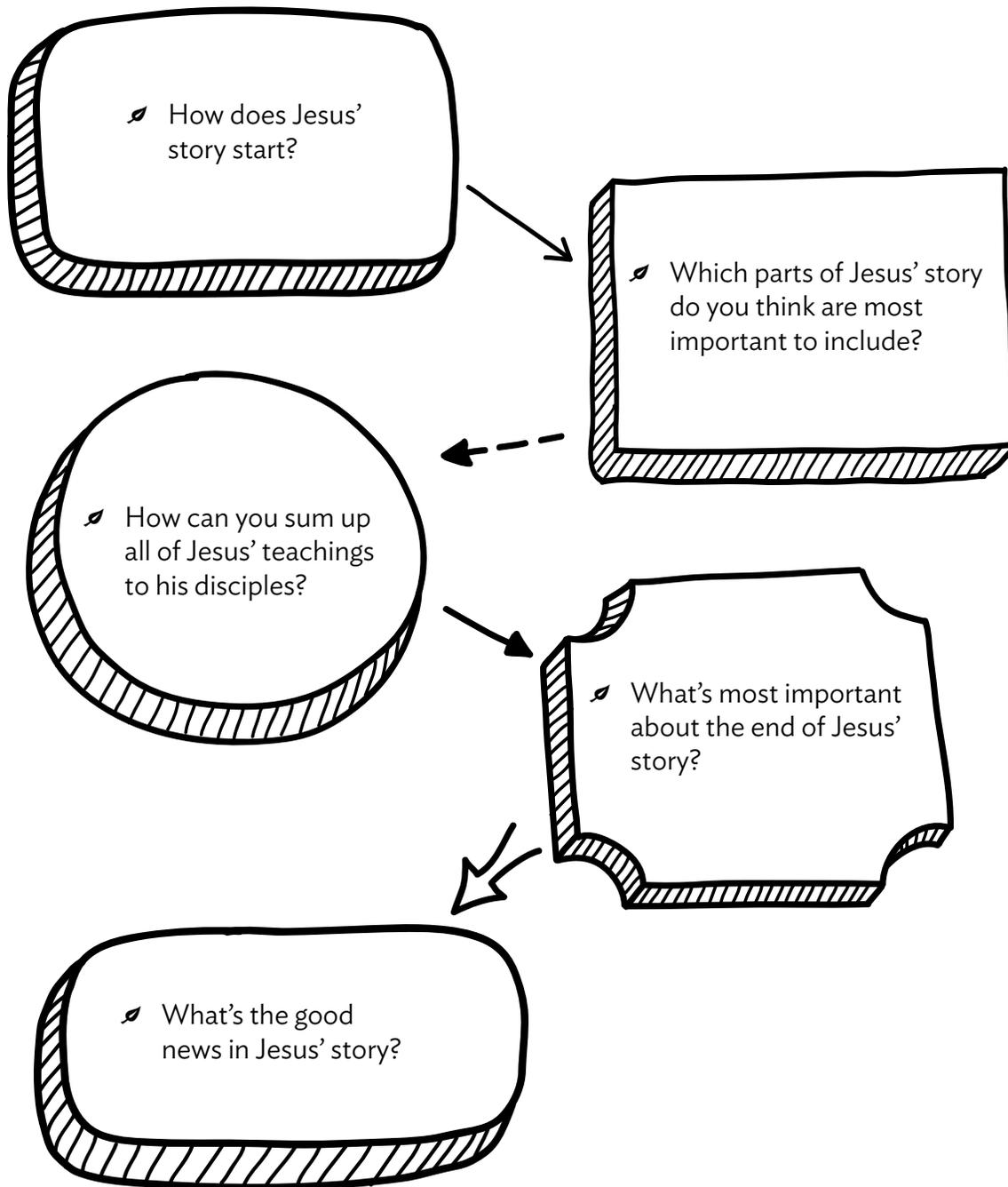


feels like . . .

by _____

The Good News in Two Minutes

1. Talk together about each of the following questions:



2. Decide what you will include in your two-minute story about Jesus and who will say which part. Tell it as a story, not a series of answers to questions.
3. Practice your story and keep it to two minutes or less.