

# 1

# Gather Together

MATTHEW 18:20; LUKE 24:13-35



## GOAL

Focusing on the gathering nature of Matthew 18:20 and the movement of worship in Luke 24:13-35, the children identify communities and gatherings that they belong to, and experience worship as a community experience.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



## PRAYER

God, who gathers us as one body, may our time together help uplift this group in learning, in worship, and in creating community centered on your Word and in your love. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

We begin this unit by laying a framework to help the children understand worship as the central way that we come together in our shared purpose as Christians. Setting the stage for the remainder of our sessions, the focus will be to create space and to understand that Jesus is present with us when we are gathered in God's name.

## THE BIBLE STORY

The story of the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35 focuses on a gathering of an undeniably small group; just three travelers strike up a conversation. And yet, we know that those were not just any three individuals; the two disciples met, not a stranger on the road, but Christ himself. Jesus' words from Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them," are often repeated, acknowledging that Jesus is with us no matter how small the gathering.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

This session intentionally begins with inviting the children to work in community to create an area in the meeting space that will be used throughout this unit (and perhaps beyond) as the group's worship space. Engaging them in this holy task both lifts up their contributions and ideas as valuable and helps foster a sense of belonging.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- "Stained-Glass Art" (p. 8): Make a frame for each child with a 1" border from a 9" x 12" piece of black construction paper. Cut two pieces of clear contact paper, 11" x 14", for each child. Cut out hearts, crosses, and butterflies from black construction paper using the templates on Resource Page 1. Cut a variety of colors of tissue paper into approximately 1½"-2" squares.
- "A Space to Gather" (p. 8): Ask a pastor or worship leader about the color of the liturgical season(s) you are leading this unit in (purple, green, red, or white) and obtain a piece of fabric in the color(s) indicated. Obtain a small table, cross, battery-operated candle(s), children's Bible or Bible storybook, clear bowl, pitcher, and artificial flowers in a container. Obtain cushions or carpet squares (optional).

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Better Together" (p. 10): Obtain *We're Better Together: A Book about Community* by Eileen Spinelli (Highlights Press, 2021).
- "A Worship Buddy" (p. 11): Obtain envelopes, stamps, and a list of names and addresses of those in your congregation who remain at home or are in care facilities and cannot attend worship or attend only virtually.



## GETTING STARTED

- Prepared 11" x 14" pieces of clear contact paper, two per child
- Prepared black construction paper frames, one per child
- Prepared black construction paper hearts, crosses, and butterflies cut out from the templates on Resource Page 1
- Variety of colored tissue paper pieces, approximately 1½"-2" squares
- White crayon, colored pencil, or gel marker

- Resource Page 2
- Rhythm instruments (optional)



Keep Resource Page 2 for sessions 2, 3, and 4.

### STAINED-GLASS ART



Greet the children as they arrive and have them sit down at the table. Invite them to make a stained-glass window. For each child, remove the backing of a piece of clear contact paper, place it face up in front of them, and put the black construction paper frame on the contact paper, leaving about a 1" border of contact paper around the frame. Invite the children to choose one or two of the black construction paper hearts, crosses, or butterflies to use in their window, placing them where they would like on the sticky contact paper inside the frame. Then tell them to place squares of colored tissue paper to cover the rest of the sticky contact paper inside the frame, leaving the outside border of contact paper free of paper. Have the children write their name on the black frame of their window using a white crayon, colored pencil, or gel marker. Assist with writing as needed. When a child has finished their window, remove the backing of a second piece of contact paper and place it over their window, matching the borders as closely as possible. Set aside the windows for "A Space to Gather" (below).

### PRAISE GOD!



Choose one of the following ways to use the adapted version of Psalm 150, found on Resource Page 2, with your group. Use a different way of reading the psalm for each session of this unit if you choose.

- Read each line aloud, inviting the children to repeat your words after you.
- Read each line aloud and do the actions in the parentheses, inviting the children to repeat your words and actions.
- Read each line aloud and do the actions in the parentheses, but when you get to the instruments mentioned, make the sounds of the instruments, inviting the children to repeat your words, actions, and sounds.
- Provide rhythm instruments. Ask the children to keep their instruments quiet unless you point to them. Read each line aloud, inviting the children to repeat after you. Like a conductor of an orchestra, point to one or more children at a time to play their instrument(s) following a line, with all instruments playing after the last line.



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Items for a worship space: a small table, fabric in the liturgical color(s) of this unit, cross, battery-operated candle(s), children's Bible or Bible storybook, clear bowl, pitcher, and artificial flowers in a container
- Cushions or carpet squares (optional)
- Children's stained-glass windows from "Stained-Glass Art" (above)

### A SPACE TO GATHER



Tell the children that today is the beginning of a new unit about the practice of *Worship God*. Invite the children to share things that they know about worship. If necessary, prompt the children by asking about where worship takes place, what they see in the worship space in the church, what happens during worship, and who they see during a time of worship. Note that some children in your group may be familiar with times and spaces of worship, and some children may never have experienced worship.

Invite the children to help you set up a worship space for your room, using the items you have gathered for the space as well as anything else they think would be important to have in that space. Encourage them to choose a spot in your space. Show them the items you have gathered and explain what they are and why they are used in worship; use the following points, if you need them:

- Liturgical color fabric: Different seasons of the church year have different colors to remind us of events in the life of Jesus and the church. Purple (sometimes blue) is used during Advent as a color of royalty and the coming of Jesus and in Lent as a color of sorrow for Jesus' suffering and death that is coming during Holy Week. White is used at Easter and the seven weeks following Easter until Pentecost to remind us of Jesus' resurrection. It is also used on other special days of Jesus' life such as Christmas Eve until Epiphany and Jesus' baptism. Red is used at Pentecost for the color of fire and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Green is used the most during the time between Pentecost and Advent (summer and fall) and between Epiphany and Lent (usually January and February), representing the new life we have in Jesus.
- The cross reminds us of Jesus' love for us.
- Candles are a symbol of God's light in the world: Jesus.
- Bibles or Bible storybooks are the stories of God, God's people, and Jesus.
- A clear bowl and pitcher of water remind us of baptism, being part of God's family, and new life with Jesus.
- Flowers remind us of God's creation.
- Stained-glass windows let the light shine through in many colors, reminding us of the variety in God's creation. Sometimes these windows tell stories from the Bible or show faithful people in the church from long ago.

Put water in the pitcher and pour it into the clear bowl. Have the children display their stained-glass windows from "Stained-Glass Art" (p. 8) around the worship space. Place chairs, carpet squares, or cushions in the space, or have them nearby so that you can use them when you gather in this space.



Keep this worship space for sessions 2, 3, and 4.

## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

### GATHERING TO HEAR GOD'S WORD



Remain in the worship space. Distribute the feet, cross, and bread cards cut from card-stock copies of Resource Page 3, giving one-third of the group each a feet card, one-third each a cross card, and one-third each a bread card. Explain that, as you read aloud the Bible story, they should follow these directions:

- If you have feet on your card, hold your card up when you hear the word *walk*, *walked*, or *walking*.
- If you have a cross on your card, hold your card up when you hear the word *Jesus*.
- If you have a loaf of bread on your card, hold your card up when you hear the word *bread*.

- Cards cut from card-stock copies of Resource Page 3, enough for one-third of the group to have feet cards, one-third to have cross cards, and one-third to have bread cards
- Resource Page 4

Tell the children that they will hear a story about Jesus meeting with some of his disciples, his friends, after he had died. Explain that it was a very surprising time because his friends knew he had died, but they didn't know he was alive again! Read aloud the adapted Bible story from Luke 24:13–35 on Resource Page 4, reminding the children to hold up their card when they hear their word or words. The words are in bold font for your convenience.

After the story, tell the children that, in this story, we can see the different parts of our worship time. Ask the following questions:

- ✦ When we begin worship, we gather together. When were Jesus' followers together in this story? Was Jesus with them?
- ✦ Next, we hear God's Word to us, we hear stories from the Bible and someone helps us understand those stories. In this story, when did the friends hear stories from their faith? Who helped them understand them?
- ✦ We often have a special meal together in worship called *communion* or *the Lord's Supper* where bread is broken and shared. When did this happen in the story, and who was sharing the bread? What did Jesus do when he took the bread? (*blessed it [or gave thanks to God for it], broke it, and gave it to them*)
- ✦ At the end of our worship service, we leave or are sent out to tell others about Jesus. What did the friends do in the story after they realized they had been with Jesus?

Tell the children that, another time when Jesus was with his disciples, his friends—when he was alive and teaching them—he told them that whenever two or three of them were gathered together, he was there with them (Matthew 18:20). Suggest that we remember those words today when we, Jesus' followers, are gathered together; just like the two followers in the story were together, we know that Jesus is with us.



## FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

- ☐ *We're Better Together: A Book about Community* by Eileen Spinelli (Highlights Press, 2021) or internet-connected device

### BETTER TOGETHER



Read the children the book *We're Better Together: A Book about Community* by Eileen Spinelli or show the video "Kids Book Read Aloud: 'We're Better Together'" ([bit.ly/FMBetterTogether](https://bit.ly/FMBetterTogether), 4:22). Encourage the children to name some of the ways that the children in the book were better together. Examples from the book include playing, cleaning up, helping and caring for others, finding lost things, making arts and crafts, making music, and being together when we are scared. Ask the children which of the things mentioned they have done as part of our church. Invite the children to share the types of things that they like to do with their communities, such as church, school, neighborhoods, families, or other communities that the children identify as important to them.

- ☐ Pictures cut apart from Resource Page 5

### STORIES OF WELCOME



Choose a few of the pictures cut apart from Resource Page 5 depicting different welcome signs. Show the children a picture and invite them to

help you tell a story for it. If necessary, set up the context for the picture. For example, with a picture of a welcome sign to a state, explain that it is a type of sign that someone would see on the road as they drive into a new state. Wonder who might see that sign, what they are doing, how they feel, and what might happen next. Then invite several children to act out the imagined story. Reflect on the story with the children, encouraging them to talk about ways that people in the stories felt welcomed, pointing out that making people feel welcome is an important part of gathering. Repeat with one or more pictures.



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

### COME! GATHER! WELCOME!

C

Ask the children to think about the last place they went (that was not their home) to gather with two or more people. Some suggestions might be a family member's or friend's home, a play center or restaurant, their school or daycare, and so forth. Tell them that you would like them to think about three questions when they went to this place. Ask the questions one at a time, inviting them to share their responses:

- Who greeted you, and what did they say?
- Was anything special said, done, or given to you when they arrived? If so, what was it?
- How did you feel you were welcomed?

Then ask the children to think about the last time they were in a worship service at your church. Be sensitive to the fact that some children may have no experience of being in a worship service. Ask the above questions again in regard to when they entered the church or sanctuary for worship, including the welcome and gathering time of the worship service itself: any words of welcome, the Call to Worship, a first hymn, or other portions that help to welcome the congregation as they gather. As the children respond, make any connections between the church community and worship and the other places they described earlier. Wonder together how they might be part of welcoming people as they gather for worship. Encourage them to say a word of welcome to someone at church.

### A WORSHIP BUDDY

A S X

Obtain a list of names and addresses of those in your congregation who remain at home or are in care facilities and cannot attend worship or attend only virtually. Address and stamp envelopes to these people.

Ask the children if they think there are people in your congregation who are not able to come to worship and be a part of the gathered community in your worship space. Wonder who they might be. Some suggestions might be those who are sick, who are in care facilities, and who don't leave their homes. Suggest that they may attend church virtually online, but they aren't physically present in the gathered community. Perhaps the children even know friends, family members, or others who are unable to leave their homes or who worship online only.

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- Copies of Resource Page 6
  - Crayons, markers
  - Envelopes
  - Stamps
  - Prepared list of names and addresses

Remind the children of the words of Jesus that they heard earlier from Matthew 18:20, that wherever two or three followers of Jesus are gathered, Jesus is there with them. Provide copies of Resource Page 6 and tell the children that they will each be making a “Worship Buddy,” which they will decorate to look like themselves or in any way that they would like. Explain that their worship buddies will be sent to those who cannot worship in person to remind them that they are a part of our community, even if they cannot gather in person with the congregation. The children may sign their own name on the “Worship Buddy,” or you or another leader may sign it on behalf of the larger group, such as “your friend from the youngest disciples group at [Name of Church].”

Place the “Worship Buddy” drawings in the addressed, stamped envelopes and mail them.



## FOLLOWING JESUS

### WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED



Move to the worship space and teach the children the song below to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell,” inviting them to follow your actions. Play the YouTube video “The Farmer in the Dell (Instrumental)” ([bit.ly /FMFarmerInstrumental](https://bit.ly/FMFarmerInstrumental), 1:50) if you would like musical accompaniment. Repeat the song one or two times.

Where two or three are here, (*jump straight up or lift arms to ceiling*)

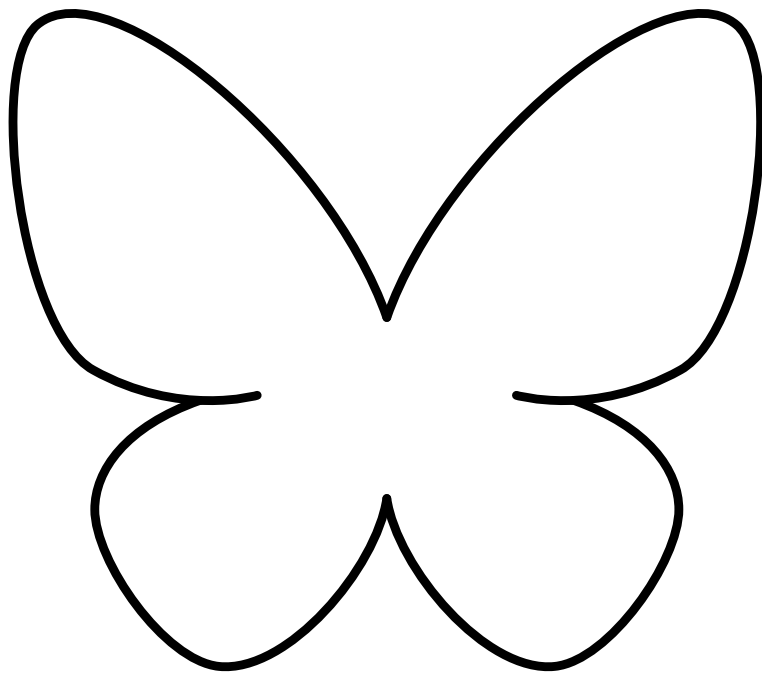
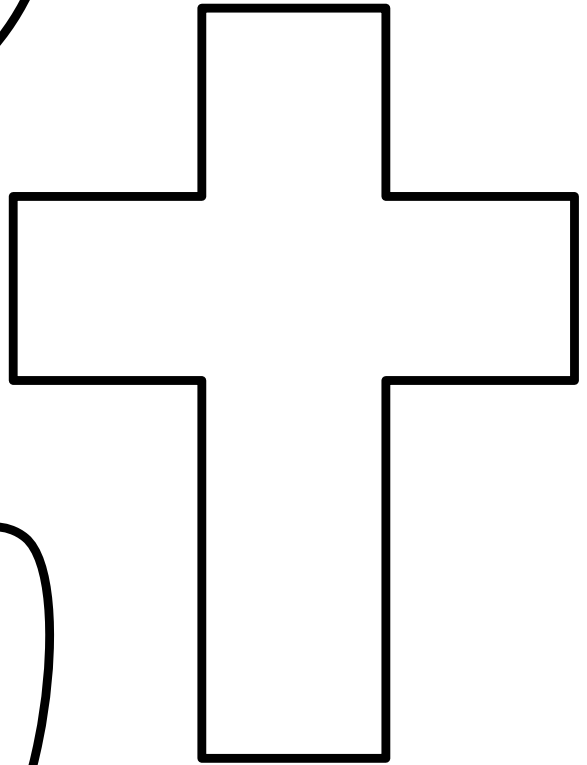
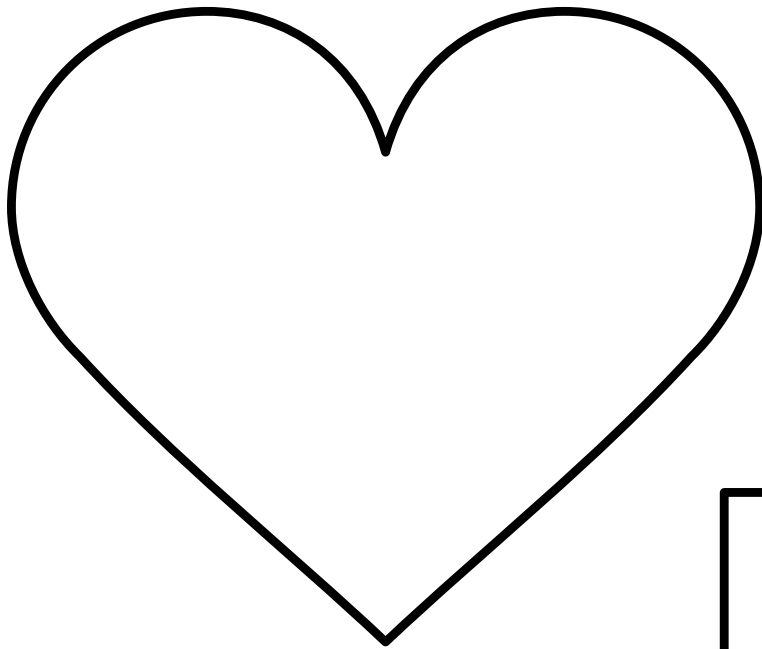
Where two or three are there, (*jump spreading legs wide or reach arms side-to-side*)

Christ is with us anywhere (*bring hands together in prayer at heart*)

When gathered here or there, (*reach arms out to grab hands of neighbor forming a circle*)

This song will be used to end each session of this unit. Here are some variations you might want to try:

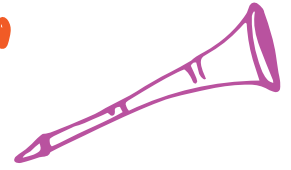
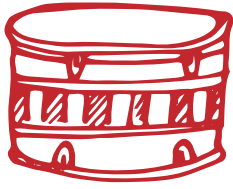
- Sing it as a call-and-response, forming two groups and having the children alternate lines.
- Add rhythm instruments and have the children play them instead of doing the motions.
- Have the children move to various places in the room on the words *here*, *there*, and *anywhere*.







# Based on Psalm 150



Praise God everyone!  
(point to people)

Praise God everywhere!  
(move arms open wide)

Praise God's mighty deeds!  
(make strong right arm)

Praise God's incredible greatness!  
(raise both hands shoulder height up and down, palms out)

Praise God with trumpet sound!  
(pretend to play a trumpet)

Praise God with lute and harp!  
(pretend to play guitar, then harp)

Praise God with tambourine!  
(pretend to shake a tambourine)

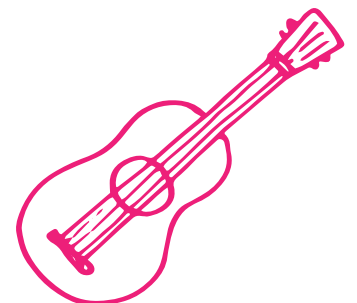
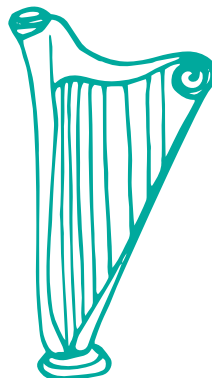
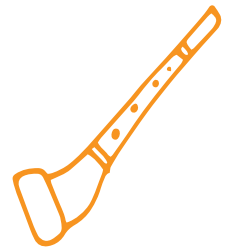
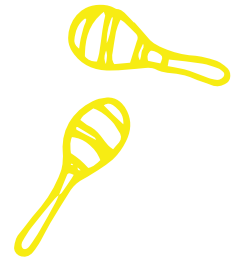
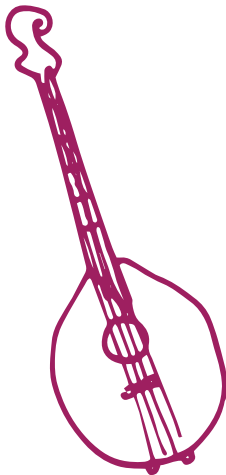
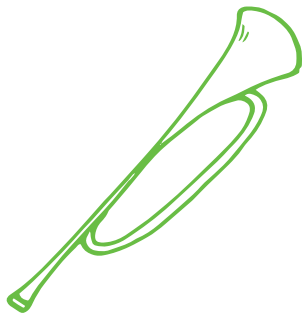
Praise God with drum and dance!  
(pretend to play a drum, then dance)

Praise God with strings and pipe!  
(pretend to play a violin, then recorder)

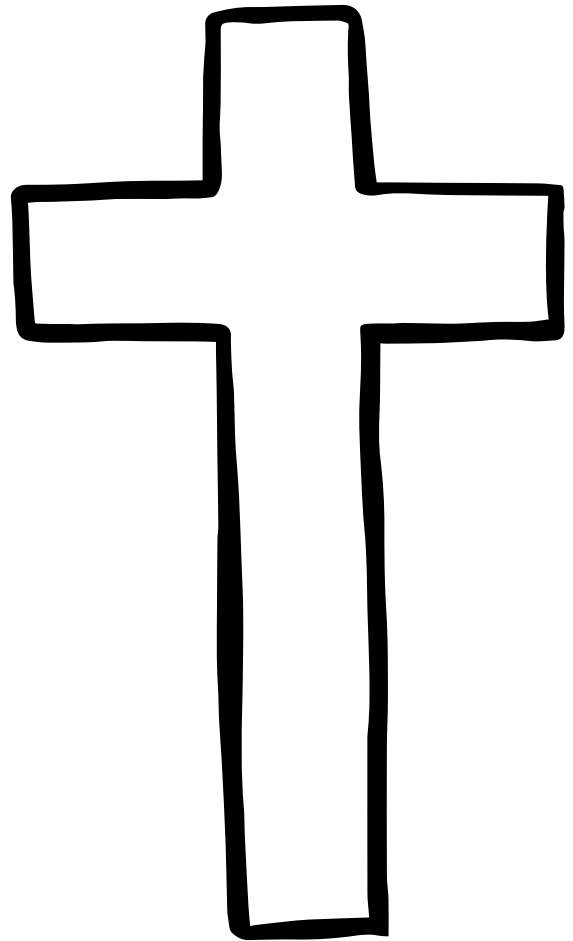
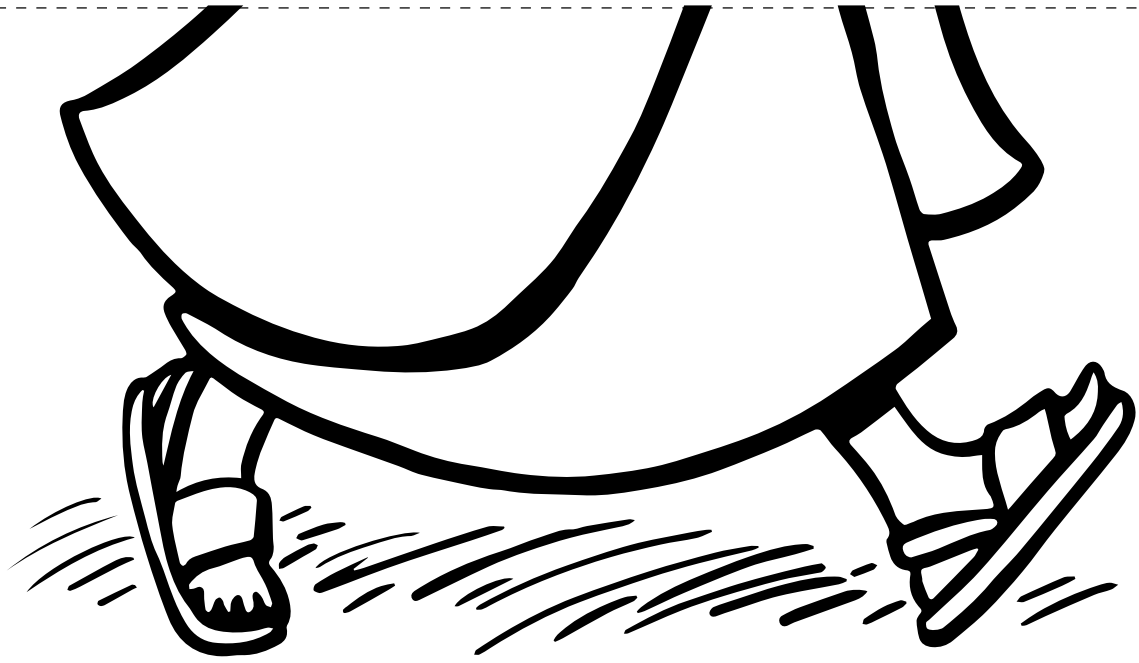
Praise God with clanging bells!  
(pretend to ring bells, swinging arms in large motions)

Praise God with loud clashing cymbals!  
(pretend to clash cymbals)

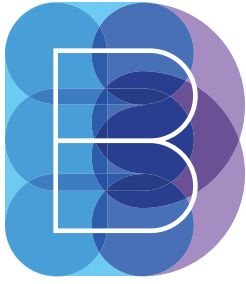
Let every living thing praise God!  
(take a deep breath, raise your hands upward)











## BIBLE STORY

### BASED ON LUKE 24:13–35

Two of Jesus' friends were on a long **walk** together. They were feeling sad because their teacher and friend, **Jesus**, had just been arrested and killed. He died and was buried in a tomb. They were also feeling very confused because, earlier that morning, other friends went to where **Jesus** was buried and found the tomb empty. While on their long **walk**, they were talking about all of the things that had happened, when a stranger joined them. (It was **Jesus**, but they did not recognize him!)

Gathered together, the three travelers talked as they **walked**. The two friends, still not realizing that this man who had joined them was **Jesus**, were shocked to learn that the man had not heard about everything that had happened, so they told him the story of **Jesus**' last days in Jerusalem. **Jesus** reminded the two to remember the words of the prophets (familiar to Jewish people at the time) that were at the heart of their worship and teaching of the faith. In the same way a teacher or pastor can explain Bible stories, **Jesus** helped the two, as they were **walking**, to understand how the things that had happened fit in with the stories they knew from their faith.

Finally, the three travelers reached the town of Emmaus. The travelers invited the stranger (Remember, it's **Jesus**!) to stay with them and have dinner. It had been a long day, and it was time to eat. Before eating the **bread** together, the stranger took the **bread** in his hands, said a prayer of blessing, broke the **bread** in two, and gave the **bread** to them. Something clicked. All of a sudden, it was like their eyes opened up, and they saw **Jesus**. Their hearts were warm with love for him, and they remembered how, just a few days before, **Jesus** had shared **bread** to eat and wine to drink with them as they had sabbath worship together. Just as suddenly, **Jesus** was no longer there, but the two thought about all **Jesus** had said to them while they were **walking** together. They immediately went to find the other disciples to share the good news that **Jesus** had been with them, **walking** with them, teaching them, and breaking **bread** with them.





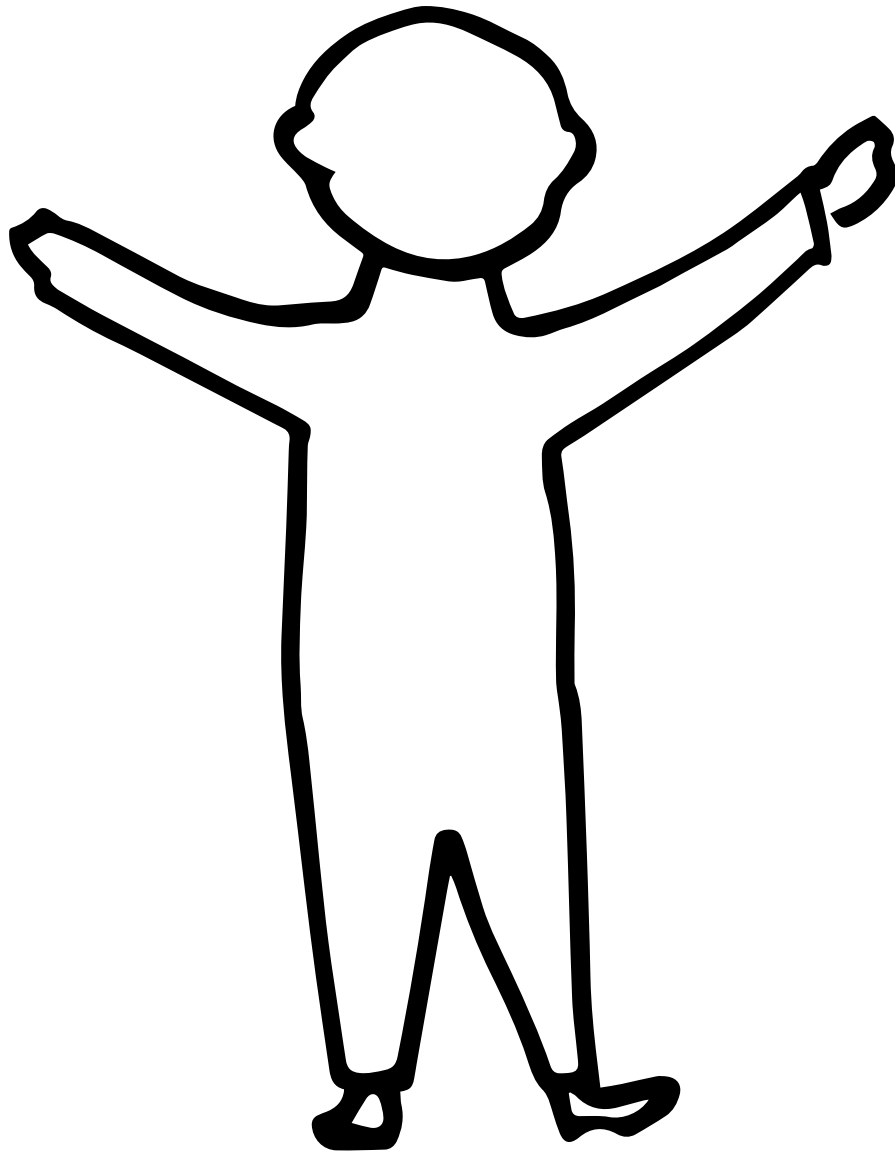
Photo Credit: Hiram Rios / Shutterstock.com



Photo Credit: Tee Jz / Shutterstock.com







Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). Even when you are not in the church building, you are still part of our worshiping community. We have made a “Worship Buddy” for you so that, when you are praying or watching worship online, you can have a buddy to gather with, remembering that our church cares for you.

Your friend,

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