

LESSON 15

THE HOLY TRINITY

FOCUS:

- **SACRED STORY**
- **CORE PRESENTATION**

THE MATERIAL

- **LOCATION: SACRED STORY SHELVES, EASTER SHELVES, FOCAL SHELVES**
- **PIECES: CREATION MATERIALS; FACES MATERIALS; PAUL'S DISCOVERY MATERIALS; 3 WHITE CIRCLES FROM BAPTISM MATERIALS (SEE NOTES ON THE MATERIAL, BELOW, FOR FULL LISTINGS)**
- **UNDERLAY: NONE**

BACKGROUND

Through the sacred stories, we have followed God's elusive presence. In the fourth century, the People of God discovered yet another way to understand this experience. It was by a strange three-in-one logic. The stories in which God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were characters were somehow one story, and yet distinct. This way of thinking preserved the unique aspects of the stories, yet joined them as one.

The Holy Trinity's inner communication is unknown to us. This is because we are created beings, made by God. We can only guess about this inner communication from what we know about how we experience God's relationship with us. As Catherine Mowry LaCugna has powerfully argued in *God for Us* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1973), "The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately therefore a teaching not about the abstract nature of God, nor about God in isolation from everything other than God, but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other" (p. 1).

This lesson combines three narratives, transforming them into the concept of the Holy Trinity. That's exactly what happened in the history of the Church in the 4th century. Under the pressure of Greek philosophy, the Church integrated three narratives, like the ones in this lesson, and developed its three-in-one logic to make them one and yet keep them distinct.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

The materials for this lesson are three stories told with cards or plaques. Two of the stories are found in this volume: the Faces of Easter (Lessons 2-8, pp. 32-68) and

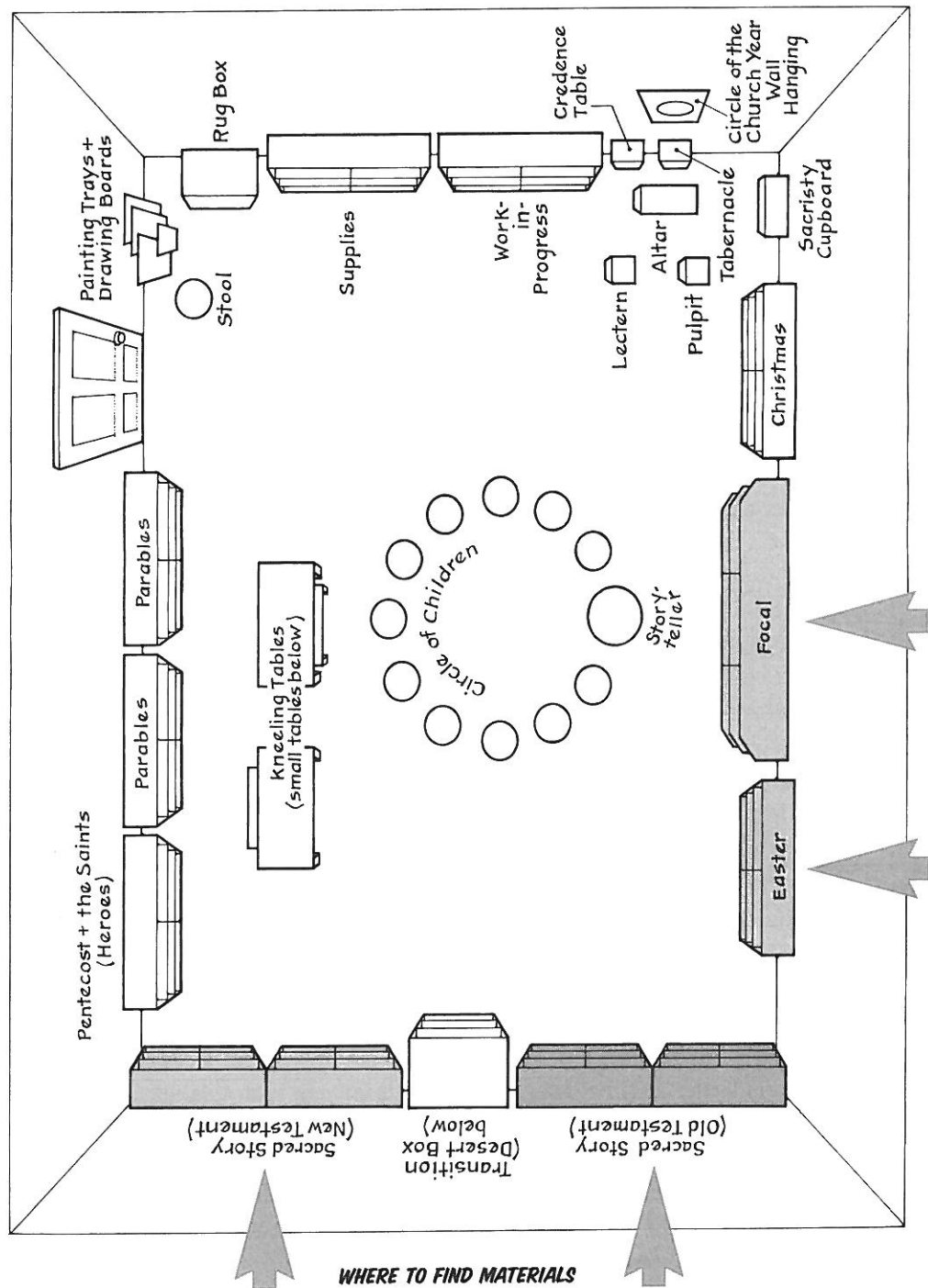
Paul's Discovery (Lesson 14, pp. 126-135). The third story, Creation, is found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 2* (Lesson 2, pp. 41-48). Each of these three stories is grouped into seven units, as shown here:

<i>Faces of Easter</i>	<i>Days of Creation</i>	<i>Journeys of Paul</i>
1. Jesus' Birth and Growth	1. Light and Dark	1. Leaving Tarsus (Paul's Birth)
2. Jesus Is Lost and Found	2. Water	2. Studying at the Temple
3. Jesus' Baptism and Blessing by God	3. Dry Land and Growing Things	3. Experience on the Road to Damascus (Baptism by the Holy Spirit)
4. Jesus' Desert and Discovery Experience	4. Day and Night	4. Escape from Damascus (and Paul's Time in the Desert)
5. Jesus as Healer and Parable-Maker	5. Swimming and Flying Creatures	5. Letters to the Churches (Paul's Work: Telling about the Power of the Holy Spirit and Writing Letters)
6. Jesus Offers the Bread and Wine	6. Creatures that Walk	6. Jerusalem for the Last Time
7. The One Who Was Easter and Still Is	7. Rest and Remember	7. Paul's Death (Death and Yet...)

Finally, you will need, from the Holy Baptism lesson (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 3*, Lesson 6, pp. 70-76), the three white circles. You will lay these circles, the symbol of the Trinity, over the curious "mess" we have created and begin to wonder about the ways God relates to us, the ways we relate to God, and the ways God relates to God within the communion of the Trinity itself.

SPECIAL NOTES

Storytelling Tip: Because this lesson pulls together three stories through the means of a *fourth* lesson (Holy Baptism), we suggest its use only with older children who are already familiar with the stories of Creation, Holy Baptism, the Faces of Easter and Paul's Discovery. You, too, will need to be familiar with these presentations to tell this synthesis lesson. (See the page citations for each story in the directions above.) The directions given below will tell you only how to adjust the basic presentations for this synthesis lesson.



MOVEMENTS

When the children are settled, go and get the materials for the Faces of Easter, Creation, Paul's Discovery and Holy Baptism. Place the materials for two of the presentations on one side of you, and the materials for the other two presentations on the other side of you.

First present the Faces of Easter. Lay it out vertically (see the illustrations on pp. 46, 51, 56, 62 and 66), so the life of Jesus grows away from you toward the children in the circle. Omit the usual wondering questions. Instead, after you present the seventh card, say:

Begin the presentation of Creation. Omit the beginning about the "biggest present you ever got." Instead, merely begin with the first day. When you finish the Creation story, omit the wondering questions. Instead invite the children to combine the two lessons as follows.

Pause a moment. Look at the Creation and the Faces of Easter. Speak slowly and with wonder.

Pick up the first Creation card, that shows "light." Look at it, then look directly at the children.

Don't place the card down without direction from the children. Only if they have no suggestions would you offer an example by picking a place that seems right to you on that day.

As you respond to the children's suggestions, there are several queries you can make, for example:

WORDS

• Watch carefully where I go so you will always know where to find this material.

There's a lot, isn't there.

• You know this lesson. You have seen it before, but there is always more. Now let me show you something interesting.

• Hmm. Look at this.

• I wonder where this day goes in that story.

• Let's try this.

• Shall I put the card here? Should I place it beside or above? Below? Do they need to be touching? Do you want it to also touch this other card? Shall I turn it like this?

MOVEMENTS

Let the children make their own decisions about such questions of placement. Affirm and support the children's choices, including the choice of diverse ideas.

After all the Creation cards are placed with the Face cards, say:

Begin to lay out and tell the Paul's Discovery. Omit the wondering questions at the end.

When the story is finished, sit back. Look back and forth between the story you have just presented and the two stories integrated together.

Pick up the first Paul card.

Again, place the card according to the children's suggestions. Ask questions to clarify their directions.

Finally, you will have guided the placing of all the Paul story with the Faces and with the days of Creation. Sit back again. Look at the clutter.

Turn to the Holy Baptism lesson beside you and pick up the large three white circles. Leave them rolled up for a moment.

Unroll and smooth out each one as you place it over the mixed-up cards. Form three connecting circles that cover as much of the cards as possible. Smooth out each circle as you name it.

Sit back and look at what you have done.

WORDS

Those are all wonderful ideas. I'm just going to place the card here, so we can go on. When you work with this on your own or with a friend, you can put it anywhere you want to.

Now let me show you something else.

I wonder where this card goes in those stories?

I wonder where these cards go in those stories? Hmm. Here is Paul studying in the Temple. Here he is on the Road to Damascus.

Oh, my, what a curious "mess"! What shall we do? It is all mixed up.

This is the Baptism lesson. We don't need all of it. Let's just take these three circles.

When we baptize someone we baptize him or her in "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

There, that's better. Now the stories are all connected by the circles, and yet each one is still there by itself. This is a strange kind of three-in-one thinking.

MOVEMENTS

Touch one of the circles.

Touch each circle again.

Sit back again.

You can wonder, too, about how God relates to God within the Trinity. This is presumptuous wondering, but many great theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas have wondered about this before us.

When the wondering loses its energy, you can then begin to put the lesson back into its various trays and baskets. Show all of this putting away to the children so they will not feel as if they have to hurry. It is a lot to put away, but you want to show that you are still involved with all the parts of the synthesis as well as the whole.

WORDS

- You see? They are all connected and yet each one is still there. It just isn't by itself anymore.
- This is a symbol for the Holy Trinity. It is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God and yet still three stories about God. We know each story tells something different about God, and yet they are still all together at the same time. That's the three-in-one thinking.
- Now I wonder which one of the three-in-one ways you like best to come close to God?

I wonder which one of the three-in-one ways is the most important way to come close to God?

I wonder which one of the three-in-one ways is most like the way you come close to God most easily? Which one is the most natural for you?

I wonder which one of the three-in-one ways we can leave out and still have all the ways we need?

- I wonder which one of the three-in-one ways God likes best to be with God?

I wonder which one of the three-in-one ways God knows is the most important way to be with God?

I wonder which one of the three-in-one ways is the way God most easily and naturally is with God?

I wonder if God can leave out any of the three-in-one ways to be with God and still have all the ways God needs to be God?

- Remember you don't have to hurry. Look at all of this. I really do wonder how these stories fit together? I wonder how they are one and yet three? It is easy to see that they are, but it's hard to talk about, isn't it? God is not so simple and yet God is, and that is truly wonderful.

MOVEMENTS

Help the children choose their own work.

WORDS

Remember to be thinking about what work you are going to get out while I am putting all of this away. It's a lot, isn't it? There.

Now, I wonder what work you would like to get out today? It could be about the Trinity, or it could be about something else. Does anyone have unfinished work?