

All Saints Day (Year B)

All who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. As in ages past, God's saints today are called to embrace God's new creation, here and now. In baptism, we become God's new creation – God's saints – and are commissioned to live now in the presence of God's promises, working toward their fulfillment.

Focus Scripture: Revelation 21:1–6a

The beginning of the book of Revelation tells us that it is the record of the visions of John concerning “what must soon take place” (1:1). The term for this kind of revelation is *apocalypse*, meaning “unveiling.” Revelation was likely written around 95 CE. This date, plus the style of language, leads most scholars to say it was not written by the apostle John or the author of the gospel of John. This John was a Christian prophet, speaking a vision of God's word to seven early churches.

A central tenet of Judeo-Christian beliefs is that the universe has been created by God for a purpose; therefore, history has meaning and purpose. According to this belief, history is not an endless cycle where events are destined to repeat themselves, but rather a path with a destination. As the Bible begins with creation in Genesis, so it ends with re-creation in Revelation. There, John speaks of the goal of God's creation – a purpose never fully realized in the history of time and space, but not entirely beyond history, either.

The text speaks of a new Jerusalem “coming down” from heaven, the place of perfection. Jerusalem, the central and most important point in the world for Jews – and at this early stage the church was predominately Jewish in self-understanding – is portrayed as a character in a wedding ceremony. In this new time of living, God will remove death and tears. The time of human pain will have passed.

At the same time, the sea is “no more.” For ancient Jews, the sea was a threatening place and in Revelation it was a place from which the beast had come (13:1). With it gone, there would no longer be any chaotic forces that resist God's sovereign love. There would be “a new heaven and a new earth” – perfect, holy, and in union with God.

This new heaven and new earth are not meant to completely replace the old, for that would mean that human history is ultimately unimportant to God. The vision is one of renewal. Like the flower in the bulb or the oak in the acorn, the new has been present in the old all along.

Another vision of God's ultimate reign is given in **Isaiah 25:6–9**. The prophet describes the time when God will call “all peoples” to a new life on God's holy mountain – a location that suggests the meeting of heaven and earth – where death will be swallowed up forever. On a similar note, the writer of **Wisdom 3:1–9** describes how God watches over the souls of righteous ones forever, in spite of what mortals may perceive. **Psalm 24:4** echoes the refrain of God's glorious reign as home for those “who do not lift up their souls to what is false.”

John 11:32–44 is the account of Jesus journeying to be with Mary and Martha as they grieve the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus weeps with them, yet still offers the promise of new life in God's glory.



It is often said that the past informs the present, but it may be just as true to say the future informs the present. When we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for the blessings God has given us to share with others. Visions of renewal, of new covenant, and of all creation singing praises to God – how do these glimpses of God's hope for the new heaven and the new earth inspire us to bring renewal right here, right now?



Focus Scripture
Revelation 21:1–6a

Additional Scriptures
Isaiah 25:6–9 or
Wisdom 3:1–9
Psalm 24
John 11:32–44

Holy God, your wisdom has formed all that has been, that is, and that shall be. Thanks for revealing your glorious ways in Christ and in the lives of all your saints. Strengthen us to live faith-filled lives, with confidence in your eternal love. Amen.

The Focus for Ages 6–8

Many children in the 6–8-year-old age range love puzzle activities, especially using word and picture codes in games and secret messages. They are developing their problem-solving skills and have longer attention spans that help them take time to figure things out. You can help them make a connection to this day's focus passage by pointing out how the writer of Revelation uses code images to speak of God's dream and wish for the world. The session provides opportunities for the children to experience and respond to the message in Revelation through using their senses and their imagination. Children are often more ready and able than adults to "step into" a

dream and may be able to encourage others to see themselves as part of this celebratory vision. Reflect on ways in which their perspectives on life encourage you to embrace the vision of God's dream for the world.

Today, as we celebrate All Saints Day, take some time with the children to think about the word "saint" and reflect on those who have provided inspiration and encouragement in their lives. You can also encourage them to recognize the ways in which they are also saints, helping to do God's work of love in the world. Pray that the children will know that they have a part to play in participating in God's dream of love and peace.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, Revelation 21:1–6a, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Bring items for the worship area: *white cloth, white pillar candle, and Bible with a bookmark placed in Revelation.*
- ❑ Bring *candlesnuffer, matches, and CD player, if possible.*
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.
- ❑ If possible, rearrange furniture, add decorations, or change pictures to create a sense of newness in the meeting space.

Gather

- ❑ Bring *tealights and taper.*
- ❑ Bring *examples of "old" and "new" things* (such as old and new shoe, sock, pencil, eraser, book, coin, toy).
- ❑ Print on newsprint the letters of the alphabet with a number underneath in sequence (such as, a=1, b=2); copy the unsolved puzzle (see "Gather" section of session) below the code.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of this week's resource sheet "God's Wonderful Dream" (p. 5).*
- ❑ Cut out teardrop shapes from *blue and green construction paper* and cloud shapes from *white construction paper*; bring *sheet of poster board.*

Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Coded message:** *sheets of coloured paper, pencils, pencil crayons, or felt markers*
- ❑ **Mural:** *mural paper, oil pastels, collage materials, glue sticks, recording of meditative music*
- ❑ **Balloon art:** *copies of resource sheet "Balloon Art Messages" (p. 6), several balloons (with no design or lettering) for each child, permanent markers, ribbon; check for latex allergies.*



All Saints Day

Scripture

Revelation 21:1–6a

FOCUS To imagine God’s wonderful dream and participate in it.

Gather

Welcome the children and newcomers. Invite children to prepare the worship space with the cloth, candle, and Bible. Explain that white is the colour used on special days like today. This is All Saints Day when we think about all the people who love God and follow Jesus.

Opening ritual

Gather the children around the worship area and light the candle. Distribute tealights and ask children to name some people who show God’s love by what they do or say. Take turns using the taper to light a tealight for each name said. Remind the children that anyone who loves God and follows Jesus is a saint.

Sing or listen to a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Pray (invite children to repeat each line after you)

Creator God,
you make everything new.
Help us dream along with you. Amen.

Extinguish the candles as a sign that the gathering ritual has ended.

Connecting life and theme

Invite the children to imagine a situation of danger in which people in Group A are being controlled by people in Group B. How could someone in Group A convey a message to other people in their group without Group B being able to understand the message? Elicit the suggestion of using a code. Show the following sample and invite the children to work together to decode the message using the alphabet number code on the newsprint (a=1, b=2, and so on).

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
23 5 3 1 14 2 5 16 1 18 20 15 6
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
7 15 4 19 4 18 5 1 13 6 15 18
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
20 8 5 23 15 18 12 4

Answer: We can be part of God’s dream for the world.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Revelation. Explain that today’s Bible story comes from a letter written a long time ago by someone called John of Patmos. He wrote this letter during a time when it was dangerous to be a follower of Jesus. During this time Christians sometimes used codes and images to share the message of God’s dream for the world.

Bible story

Share the introductory information on the resource sheet “God’s Wonderful Dream.” Invite the children to participate in the story, based on

Revelation 21:1–6a, following the suggestions on the resource sheet.

After the story

Explain that John wrote about God’s dream for a world changed and transformed by loving and caring actions. In the letter he said that in God’s new world everything will be different and there will be no more crying or hurting. Distribute teardrop shapes and invite children to take turns taping them onto the poster board as they respond to the following question.

- **What are some situations where people are sad or hurting in our world today?**

On All Saints Day we think about people who have participated in sharing God’s love and making the world a better place.

- **We are saints too. What actions can we take to participate in God’s dream for our world?**

Distribute the cloud shapes and invite children to draw on these some actions, and tape the shapes over the teardrops.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Coded message** The book of Revelation was a letter written in a special code, and it helped people to imagine a better world. Invite the children to create a coded message by using their own creativity to develop picture/number/letter codes for a short message, such as: “God makes things new.” Encourage them to share their messages with friends and family as an invitation to imagine and participate in God’s dream for the world.
- **Mural** All Saints Day gives us a chance to recognize how we are saints when we participate in God’s wonderful dream for the world. Stretch a length of mural paper along a table and invite children to work together with the art and craft



supplies to create a mural of images and words that express things they can do to participate in God’s dream for a wonderful world. Play a selection of meditative music as they work.

- **Balloon art** The message in John’s vision encourages us to have hope that God’s new heaven and new earth will come one day. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Balloon Art Messages” and read together the verses from **Revelation 21:1–6a**. Distribute balloons and have children choose a word from each of their chosen verses to write on their balloons, and then fold each verse up and insert inside a balloon. Inflate the balloons, with the messages inside, tie the ends closed, and tie onto lengths of ribbon. Display in meeting space or church hall.

Bless

Gather in the worship area and relight the candle. Recall that today we welcomed each other and heard a story from the Bible about ways we can be part of God’s dream for the world.

Pray using the following prayer or one of your own.

Dear God,
help us, as your saints, to be part
of your dream for the world. Amen.

Sing or listen to a blessing song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Send each child out with the words, “(Child’s name), you are a saint. Go and help make God’s dream come true!”

Reflect

What visions and dreams were expressed by the children as they thought about participating in God’s dream?

How can you continue to affirm that they are saints, God’s precious ones?



God's Wonderful Dream

(based on Revelation 21:1–6)

In the years after Jesus had been born the emperor of Rome controlled many countries, including the lands where the followers of Jesus were trying to continue his ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. The emperor wanted people to treat him as if he were God. Many people, including Christians, would not do this, and were punished for disobeying the emperor. This was a dangerous time to be a follower of Jesus.

Almost a hundred years after Jesus had been born on earth, a follower of Jesus named John was sent to prison on the island of Patmos. From there he wrote letters to his Christian friends. These letters are part of the Bible, called Revelation. John wanted to tell the friends of Jesus that God was with them, and that God loved them. John also wanted to tell them that a better time was coming when people would be able to worship God without being afraid.

In his letters, John describes a dream that God gave him of what the world could be like. John described this dream in a kind of code. The people who read John's letter would know that when he spoke of "the

Lamb" he was really speaking about Jesus. When he spoke about a "holy city" he was really talking about God's people, and when he spoke about hearing a "voice" he was really talking about God.

(Invite the children to listen for these code words as you read a portion of John's letter. When they hear "the Lamb" give a hand signal for them to whisper "Jesus." When they hear "Holy City" give a hand signal for them to whisper "God's people." When they hear "voice," give a hand signal for them to whisper "God.")

From John of Patmos To Christian friends,

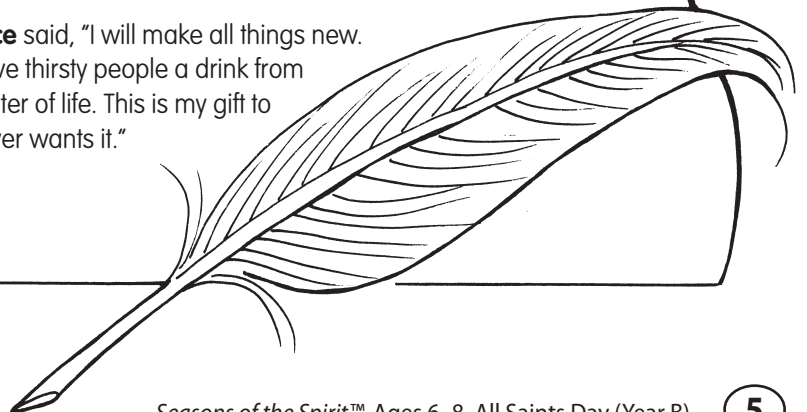
The rulers have sent me to this island because I am a follower of Jesus. I still am trusting in God, and I have a message for you that can help you to also trust in God. This message came to me in a special way. It was as if God had given me a dream and was helping me to write this letter to you about it.

In this dream, I saw a book that told about God's love for the world. Only **the Lamb** could open this book. **The Lamb** will help people all over the world to know and love God. To **the Lamb** will be given wisdom and honour and glory.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. I saw a **Holy City**. It was as if everyone in the **Holy City** were dressed up for a wedding party.

Then I heard a loud **voice** saying, "God's home is with the people of the world. God will live with them. God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more crying, and no more hurting. Everything will be different."

The **voice** said, "I will make all things new. I will give thirsty people a drink from the water of life. This is my gift to whoever wants it."





Balloon Art Messages

(based on Revelation 21:1–6a)

I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

The old earth had disappeared.

God lives with the people.

Everyone is now God's own people.

God will wipe all of the tears away.

There won't be any more crying or
suffering.

God is making everything new.

God is the beginning and the end.