



# 'Light for the Path' a Resource for Families in the Year of Mercy

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## Session One: The Tenderness of God's Mercy seen through Mary, Mother of Mercy

### Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

- Decide on the best time, before or after school, evening or weekend
- Welcome and introductions for everyone: *'Family for me is.....'*

### Background: What is the 'Holy Year of Mercy'?

'Holy Years' have been part of the life of the Church for 1000 years. Recently we have had Holy Years for Eucharist, The Word, Faith, St Paul, and Consecrated Life. Special years are found in the Old Testament, to do with giving from what you have - time and money and energy - to care for others. A 'Jubilee Year' or 'Year of the Lord's Favour' was celebrated every 50 years. Jesus in his early ministry stood up in the Synagogue and read from the Book of Isaiah, *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to proclaim a year of the Lord's favour'*. Jesus himself is the human 'face' of God's loving kindness or 'mercy'. Mercy is not simply part of God's love – it is the way Jesus asks us to follow him, lived out every day. As baptised Christians, we are soaked in the mercy of God, so that we can be merciful ourselves. Pope Francis announced the Year of Mercy, to run from 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015 to 20 November 2016. The whole year is a special opportunity to think about mercy, and how we live it in our relationships, at home, at work, in our parishes, in our world.

### Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

- What does the word 'mercy' mean to you and me? (talk about it together)

- Other people have said that mercy is about: being generous with love; it's something you give and receive; it's going the extra mile; it's being kind & compassionate.

**In our Catholic tradition**, we describe being merciful as **love in action** (*feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty and clothes to those who have none, welcoming the stranger, healing the sick, visiting those in prison, burying the dead*)

We also say it's **merciful to be there for others** (*when there is confusion and doubt; to educate out of ignorance and poverty; to be close and give comfort to lonely and grieving people; to forgive; to be patient and peace-loving; to pray for one another, living and dead*)

Together, we describe these things as '**The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy**'

### **Why do we start the Year of Mercy with Mary? What do you think?**

No-one understands the amazing things that God has done for us quite like Mary. God chose Mary to be the Mother of the Son of God. She was the one who said 'Yes' when God asked her! She was the one who carried the baby in her womb, and gave birth to Jesus, 'the face of the Father's mercy'. Jesus, born of Mary, shows us what God's love is like, coming as a human baby, and growing to a man as son of Mary. In his whole life – his words, actions, his entire person, Jesus shows us what it really is to be 'merciful like the Father' (Luke 6:36) Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father. Mary points to Jesus, knowing he is 'The Way' for us to follow. Mary visits Elizabeth early on in her pregnancy, and sings a great hymn of thanks and praise to God on her cousin's doorstep. The song is about God's loving kindness and mercy to her, and poured out to grandparents, parents and children, down all the generations, right to us!

### **What's it Like In Our Family?**

- How do we feel when we hear the news that someone in the family is going to have a baby? What difference does a baby make in a family? To the parents? Grandparents? Brothers and sisters? Aunts, uncles and cousins?
- And when they are born, what is it like to see the baby for the first time, and to hold him or her? What are our hopes and dreams for them?

### Step Three: We listen – the Word of God (see pictures on back page)

Invite someone to read the story, slowly. Ask everyone to listen and see what catches their attention – a word, phrase or picture that stays with them. Use a bible, marking the pages in advance (Luke 1:26-32, 36, and 39-44) or read from the text box below:

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, and her name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured. The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean. " Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, his kingdom will never end....v.36 Know this too, your cousin Elizabeth is, in her old age, also going to have a baby, and people called her 'barren'. Nothing is impossible with God". "I am the handmaid of the Lord" said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

v.39-44: Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as she heard Mary's voice, she felt the baby inside her leap for joy... and she said 'Of all women, you are the most blessed, and blessed is the baby you are going to have. When you spoke, the baby within me jumped! Something wonderful is going to happen with your baby and with mine too.'

v.46 And Mary sang a song of praise to God,... 'My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has done great things for me, and Holy is his Name. **His faithful love and mercy extends to all generations**'.

### Step Four: We Respond

- What did you see or notice in this story? What word or phrase or picture caught your attention? What 'works of mercy' can you identify in the story?
- What did you like best? I wonder what it was like for Mary, hearing she was to have a baby? I wonder what she was looking forward to? What was she wondering about?
- She made a visit to her cousin Elizabeth. How did they help each other? Who is there to 'listen' to you? Who do you listen to in challenging times?
- Mary's song just burst out of her, full of joy and wonder and thanksgiving, for God's loving kindness or 'mercy' to her, and through Jesus her Son, to all generations of

people. What does Mary's song say to you? Who are the 'generations' in your family? How do you experience God's 'faithful love and mercy' in your family?

- I wonder what it is like to be IN this story? And what this story tells us about our family, our community, and the ways we are 'merciful'?

### Step Five: We Mix it Together

In this Holy Year of Mercy, Pope Francis is asking us to be more aware of the ways we can be loving and kind, or 'merciful' to others. What do you think?

- Being welcoming to visitors and looking after them?
- Noticing when we hurt one another, and saying sorry, meaning it, and asking for forgiveness?
- Being close to people when they are confused about something, or worried or lonely?

### Step Six: What Might We Do Differently Or New This Week?

- What kind, loving act might we do for someone else?

### Step Seven: We Pray

**Leader:** We sit quietly for a moment, remembering the stories we have shared. (...) As we think about the Angel's announcement to Mary, that God has chosen her to be the Mother of Jesus, the face of mercy, and her 'Yes', let us ask Mary to pray for us and our families and communities, for our own 'Yes' to sharing God's love and mercy with others:

**Hail Mary.....**

**Leader:** Heavenly Father, your love and mercy are for everyone, without exception. May we ourselves be the face of mercy for others. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

**God of Surprises!** Notice how many times the word 'mercy' appears in the prayers of the Mass. e.g. At the beginning of Mass, after asking forgiveness for the ways we have hurt one another, we hear the words of the priest:

**'May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.'**

## Step Three: We listen – the Word of God (see pictures on back page)

### Pictures for Step Three: We listen – the Word of God

Here are two pictures, one old, one modern. What do you notice?

- The Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary
- The Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth

Which picture do you like best? What is each picture telling you about Mary? And about Elizabeth? And about being 'merciful' or giving and receiving mercy?

What do the pictures say about how you care for each other in your own family life?



Fra Angelico, **The Annunciation** (1436) Wikipedia Commons



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