

**NEW! WEEKLY GOSPEL  
REFLECTION VIDEOS**

**Leader's Guide**

LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN

# Children Celebrate!



**Winter 2023–2024** (Year A/B)

**NOVEMBER 26, 2023** | OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE  
through **FEBRUARY 18, 2024** | FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

# Children Celebrate!

Liturgy of the Word with Children

LEADER'S GUIDE

Winter 2023–2024

YEAR A/B

**November 26, 2023**

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

*through*

**February 18, 2024**

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

**Pflaum Publishing Group**

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# Children Celebrate!

Liturgy of the Word with Children

Written by Sr. Alice Ann Pfeifer, CSA

Edited by Blue Willow  
Publishing Works

Design by Jeff McCall

Scripture Illustrations by  
Marcelino Truong © Bayard Presse

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## Additional Resources at Pflaum.com

### Sunday Readings

For your convenience, each Sunday's Lectionary readings for the Liturgy of the Word with Children can be downloaded from [pflaum.com](http://pflaum.com). It's as easy as 1-2-3!

1. Go to **[pflaum.com/readings](http://pflaum.com/readings)** for a list of Sunday readings (updated at the end of each month).
2. Click on the date you want. That Sunday's readings will open in a PDF.
3. Print or download the file.

*For more about the Sunday Readings, see the Introduction to this Leader's Guide.*

### Weekly Gospel Reflection Videos!

Available to subscribers of *Children Celebrate!*

Visit <http://bit.ly/3x37mJb> for weekly Gospel Reflection videos. These videos can be used within your Children's Liturgy of the Word program, or shared with parents and families to view at home.

### Children Celebrate! Director's Manual

For an easy-to-follow Director's Manual, go to **[pflaum.com/liturgy-of-the-word](http://pflaum.com/liturgy-of-the-word)** and click on "Bonus Resources" and then "Program Directors." There you will find a manual that outlines practical steps for establishing a program, recruiting and training volunteers, and creating the proper environment and liturgical flow.

In addition, you will learn how to most effectively incorporate *Children Celebrate!* materials into your program. Additional resources are also suggested.

### Children Celebrate! Children's Liturgy of the Word – MP3 Album

With joyful melodies, call-and-response segments, and child-friendly lyrics, John Burland's inviting liturgical pieces are perfect for Children's Liturgy of the Word programs. For example, "Go Now and Listen to God's Word" can be sung as children are dismissed from the assembly, and "Yes, Lord, I Believe" is a jubilant option for singing the Creed, helping little ones to profess their faith.

Visit **[giamusic.com](http://giamusic.com)** and search "Children Celebrate" to order.

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# This Issue's Themes

DATE	SUNDAY	THEME
November 26, 2023	OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE	Bless the Poor and You'll Be Blessed
December 3, 2023	1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Jesus Says Be Ready
December 10, 2023	2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Turn Back to God
December 17, 2023	3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Get Ready for the Lord!
December 24, 2023	4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT	Nothing Is Impossible With God
December 31, 2023	HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH	Listen to God
January 7, 2024	EPIPHANY OF THE LORD	Guide Us to Jesus
January 14, 2024	2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Here Am I, Lord
January 21, 2024	3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	We Are Called to Follow Jesus
January 28, 2024	4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Jesus Keeps Us Safe
February 4, 2024	5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Jesus Heals Us
February 11, 2024	6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	Jesus Heals Everyone
February 18, 2024	1ST SUNDAY OF LENT	Believe the Good News

## Using *Children Celebrate!*

*Children Celebrate!* is a complete step-by-step resource for celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with Children. The two components of *Children Celebrate!* are this Leader's Guide and the Children's Leaflets, a book of tear-out, take-home sheets.

### LEADER'S GUIDE (each week has two parts)

**I. Preparation** provides the leader with information about the week's Scripture readings and how they relate to children today. Its elements are the following:

- **Today's Readings** cites the exact Scripture readings you will be using that day. (Remember, these readings do not always match the readings chosen for the adults. See more about the

readings on page 6.) A theme sets the tone of that day's liturgy.

- **Prepare with Prayer** helps center you on the task at hand, which is not only helping children hear and understand God's Word but also hearing and understanding God's Word **through** the children.
- **Scripture Background** helps you understand the readings and prepare to break open the Word.
- **Prepare the Meeting Space** gives you suggestions for enhancing the environment for that day's celebration. Review this section a few days before the liturgy.



- **Suggested Music** provides suggestions for appropriate songs during the liturgy. Information on where to find each piece of suggested music is on page 62.
- **Children's Connections** explains each week's theme and Scripture message as it applies to children today.
- **More About...** provides additional background about a topic that is related to this week's liturgy.
- **Using the Children's Leaflet** provides brief background information about the take-home sheet.
- **Activity** provides a reproduction of the take-home sheet. Solutions to puzzles are shown as needed.

**II. The Liturgy of the Word** is a ready-made liturgy specifically written for that week's readings and theme. Its elements are the following:

- **Gathering** helps the children settle into their places. Playing appropriate background music or singing a song provides a transition into an attitude of prayer.
- **Collect** sets the tone for the worship experience.
- **Focus Statements** for each of the readings help you give the children a key idea to listen for and to help them better understand the theme of the readings.
- **Responsorial Psalm and Gospel Acclamation** provide liturgically appropriate responses for the children to use.
- **Homily** gives you starter ideas for interesting, creative, and relevant reflections on the Gospel.
- **Profession of Faith** is a simple and interactive declaration of what we believe as Catholics.
- **Prayer of the Faithful** are the prayers for the needs of the world, the Church, and the community. These are often a common first step for children into spontaneous prayer and can be powerful moments for children.

- **Return to Assembly** provides the leader with a cue to prepare the children to rejoin the main assembly and to remind them to take home a Children's Leaflet.

## CHILDREN'S LEAFLETS (each leaflet is two-sided)

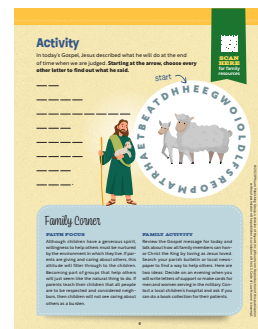
### Front Side

- **Today's Readings** gives the Scripture citations for that Sunday's liturgy.
- **We Pray** is a short prayer for children based on the week's theme.
- **The Word of God This Week** is a summary of the day's Gospel story.



### Back Side

- **Activity** provides an entertaining way to reinforce the Gospel message.
- **Faith Focus** highlights how the Gospel message can pertain to the family.
- **Family Activity** provides practical suggestions to families on how to put the Gospel into action at home.



## WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION VIDEOS

- **How to access the videos:** Visit <http://bit.ly/3x37mJb> to view the videos for this quarter.
- **What's included?** Each weekly video includes a Gospel Reflection, Saint Spotlight, Closing Prayer, and Reflection Question.
- **Promote:** Share these videos with those assisting with Children's Liturgy of the Word for use during your program, as well as with parents and families.

# Introduction

## What Is Liturgy of the Word with Children?

Liturgy of the Word with Children is a worship experience geared especially for children. It mirrors the worship experience of the larger community, with a style that is engaging and interactive. Jesus himself recognized that children have a pure spirituality, and he made them the primary spiritual model for all believers.

Liturgy of the Word with Children is not formal religious education, nor is it intended to be a substitute for attendance at religious education sessions. Rather, it should be considered a partner to religious education programs. Both are important for a child's spiritual development, just as continuing faith formation and growth in spirituality are important for adults.

The Word of God has a message that is as relevant and fitting for children as it is for adults. The children, however, often fail to hear the message simply because the adult vocabulary is beyond their comprehension. Liturgy of the Word with Children offers an experience for the children to hear Scripture in words they understand and to share their own understanding of God's Word.

Celebrating the Liturgy of the Word in this way is an empowering experience, giving children a foundation for understanding and appreciating Scripture. Over several years, the children not only become comfortable with hearing and discussing God's Word but also gain an understanding of and appreciation for their liturgical heritage as Catholics.

## When and How Do the Children Leave the Assembly?

The celebration of the Liturgy of the Word with Children follows the same structure as the Liturgy of the Word for the entire assembly. In fact, it begins with the Introductory Rites, which are celebrated in the large assembly, where the children are seated with their families.

After the Introductory Rites, the presider invites any children wishing to participate to join the leader and proceed to the worship space set aside for them. They return after the Prayer of the Faithful to celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist with the entire community.

## What About the Readings?

**The readings in the children's Lectionary sometimes differ from those used in the adult Lectionary.** When planning liturgies to be used with children, the Church allows some flexibility in the number and choice of readings on Sundays and feast days.

According to the *Directory for Masses with Children*, "If three or even two readings appointed on Sundays or weekdays can be understood by children only with difficulty, it is permissible to read two or only one of them, but the reading of the Gospel should never be omitted" (Chapter III, No. 42). In addition, because of the difficulty some children may have in understanding certain verses, it is sometimes possible to omit one or another verse from the reading. (For a complete reading of the directives regarding selection of readings, see the *Directory for Masses with Children*, Chapter III, Nos. 41–47.)

In *Children Celebrate!* we follow the readings from the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, which is approved for use in all dioceses of the United States by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. We determine themes and make suggestions for each Sunday's liturgy based on these readings. For this reason, it is important that you check each week's citations as listed in this Leader's Guide before finalizing your plans for that Sunday's celebration.

## Preview the Readings

*If you do not have access to a children's Lectionary while you prepare your liturgy, you have three other options for previewing the readings for each Sunday.*

**1** Go to our website ([pflaum.com/readings](http://pflaum.com/readings)), click on the date you need, and print or download the readings.

**2** The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* uses readings from the Old Testament and Book of Psalms. A select number of the refrains for the Responsorial Psalms are taken from the *Contemporary English Version* © 1991 by the American Bible Society. Readings from the New Testament are taken from the *Contemporary English Version, Bible for Today's Family: New Testament* © 1991 by the American Bible Society. The CEV can be purchased at stores and at [americanbible.org](http://americanbible.org).

**3** Go to [americanbible.org](http://americanbible.org). Scroll over BIBLE RESOURCES. Scroll down and click on BIBLE SEARCH. Under the search box, click on Search Options. Select CEV Contemporary English Version (US Version). Enter the book, chapter, and verses that you need, such as Luke 15:11–32.

## Where Do I Begin?

Your first step to prepare a Sunday session should be to pray for guidance. “Prepare with Prayer” opens each week's background material. It will help you begin to focus your mind and open your heart to God's message. Remain in prayer as long as you like.

Read the Scripture and background material in their entirety. Although the story may be familiar, you may see it with new eyes when challenged to lead a reflection on it. The background material will give you an idea of the social and historical context behind the Scripture.

Gather and write down your thoughts for the reflection. Look at them and meditate on them for a while. Certain themes or ideas will come through. Create an outline for your reflection based on these ideas.

Be sure to read through the Prepare the Meeting Space and The Liturgy of the Word sections well in advance so that you are not taken by surprise by any preparations you should have made or items you will need on hand. Allow plenty of time to set up and prepare before the session.

## What Else Should I Know?

### LITURGICAL COLORS

This edition of *Children Celebrate!* covers Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe through the First Sunday of Lent. For Christ the King, the liturgical color is white or gold. To represent the penitential season of Lent, the color used is purple/violet. Use the liturgical colors on the table where you place the Lectionary or in other elements you use in your worship area.

### MOVEMENT

Introduce movement wherever you feel it could be appropriate in the liturgy. Young muscles cry out to be used often, and this physical need causes the restlessness that some adults find irritating. Even the simple act of lifting their arms in prayer or carrying some small object to the front of the room can give children a refreshing but orderly break from being in one position for too long.

## Trust Yourself

Finally, remember that *Children Celebrate!* is a complete resource that you can trust to be liturgically sound while also being creative. Nevertheless, you are the leader and you must be comfortable with what you want to do each week. Feel free to use (and trust) your own ideas as well.

There is no limit to what God can work through each of us. Your time with these children will have God's blessing and will be immeasurably fruitful. Enjoy!



## Today's Readings

Romans 16:25–27

Psalms 47:1–2, 7–8

Luke 1:26–38

## Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a violet cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ an assortment of ordinary objects that can represent various occupations: a hammer, a cooking spoon, red pen or pencil, and so forth.

## Suggested Music

See page 62 for more information.

### GATHERING:

**“Mary, Our Mother”** (Seeds CD-2, Track #23) or **“Mary, O Blessed One”** (Promise & Good News CD-1, Track #3)

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

**“Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia”** (Promise & Good News CD-2, Track #24)



# Nothing Is Impossible with God

## PREPARATION

### Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

## PREPARE WITH PRAYER

*With all my heart I praise the Lord,  
and I am glad because of God  
my Savior. (LUKE 1:46)*

### Scripture Background

The Romans whom Saint Paul addresses in the First Reading are Christians who have returned to Rome some five years after having been expelled by Emperor Claudius. Due to complex, intersecting religious and political circumstances, several parts of the world weren't exactly safe for Christians in Paul's time. The Gospel, however, kept believers strong in the face of trials.

Leaping ahead to 2002, Christian missionary Gracia Burnham told reporters that the Gospel had kept her strong during a yearlong hostage ordeal in the Philippine jungle. Denied a Bible, she and her husband relied on memory to recall comforting Bible passages from time to time and to sing, alphabetically, every hymn they could remember from the hymnals used in their church back home.

Today's Gospel introduces the first woman ever to have experienced the strengthening power of the Christian message. Her name wasn't Gracia, but coincidentally, she was “full of grace.”

In ancient Greek, the word grace implied a combination of joy and wisdom. Mary was a woman of profound inner joy, the result of living in constant awareness of God's presence in her life and in the life of her people. Acting with wisdom—which, to the Jews, meant acting in harmony with God's will—came as second nature to her.

Thus, when Mary agreed to her “unplanned parenthood,” she wasn't coming up with a sudden new self-description. Rather, she simply stated how she habitually saw herself: as God's servant.



## CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

Years ago in a little house outside a small town, two young children enjoyed playing “master and servant” with their mother’s collection of bells. While the “master” lounged on a couch, the “servant” came running each time the master rang a bell to issue a command: “Get me a glass of water,” “Turn on the TV,” and so on. The children took turns being the servant, but usually their game abruptly ended whenever the master, becoming tyrannical, issued an unreasonable command: “Clean the whole house before Mom gets home from work.”

It is often said that children are naturally egotistical and self-centered, but with few exceptions, aren’t we all? Jesus seems to have understood that when he said, “If you want the place of honor, you must become a slave and serve others!” (Mark 9:35) He knew he’d have to appeal to our egos, our wish for greatness, in order to get us to do the right thing.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” is perhaps the perennial question that adults ask children. Doubtless, no child ever replies, “A servant.”

As far as most of us are concerned, servanthood is nothing to strive for. In today’s liturgy, through the Gathering activity and its companion homily, you will use a teaching trick that Jesus used in his parables. You will turn a preconception on its head, first startling your young listeners, then giving them a point to ponder: servanthood is a state to strive for—as long as you choose God as your master.

## THE CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children’s Leaflet for this week helps the children learn about saying “yes” to God, through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

Distribute copies of the leaflet. If time permits, read with the children the summary of this week’s Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.

**BONUS LESSON:** Go to <https://www.pflaum.com/liturgy-of-the-word/bonus-resources/> to download and share the Children Celebrate lesson and leaflet for Christmas Day.



## More About ...

### Luke and the Holy Spirit

References to the Holy Spirit appear frequently in Luke’s writings. Important to remember, however, is that no New Testament writer yet possessed a fully developed theology of the Trinity. All four evangelists therefore understood the Spirit mostly in Old Testament terms.

For the Jews, God alone was the Holy One. Things and persons that belonged to God were holy only indirectly— because God had breathed his own holiness into them. The Spirit was viewed as a projection of God’s own essence into the world God had created.

The holy Spirit (with the word “holy” always rendered in the lower case) was the breath of God becoming the life principle in all things living. Whenever and wherever God withdrew his breath, life ended. More than a life principle, however, the Spirit also was an agent of divine action in the world. Whenever and wherever the Spirit moved, God’s saving power manifested in creative new ways.



### Leaflet Activity

Saying a family Rosary is the ideal activity this week as we hear the story of the Annunciation in Luke's Gospel. The children complete a word search activity to review important names and words in the Gospel.

## THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

### Gathering

After finishing the Gathering song, tell the children that the objects on the table represent all different kinds of work that adults do. Then hold up each object and ask the children to name the kind of worker who uses that object— hammer (carpenter); wooden spoon (chef); chalk (teacher), and so forth. Conclude with these questions:

- Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? (Allow time for children to share.)
- How about being a servant when you grow up? Would you like that? Why or why not?

### Opening Prayer

**LEADER:** Now let us bow our heads for prayer. Please repeat each line after me. You have looked into my heart, Lord.

**CHILDREN:** You have looked into my heart, Lord.

**LEADER:** You know all about me.

**CHILDREN:** You know all about me.

**LEADER:** So don't let me follow evil ways, Lord.

**CHILDREN:** So don't let me follow evil ways, Lord.

**LEADER:** But lead me in the ways that are good and true. Amen.

**CHILDREN:** But lead me in the ways that are good and true. Amen.

*Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.*

### First Reading

**LEADER:** If we want to live good lives and do good work when we grow up, we need to be strong in heart and soul. In today's First Reading, Saint Paul tells us what can make us strong.

*Read Romans 16:25–27. Then say, "The word of the Lord."*

**CHILDREN:** Thanks be to God.

### Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning, sing or announce the response.

**LEADER:** God is King of all the earth!

**CHILDREN:** God is King of all the earth!

**LEADER:** *Read Psalm 47:1–2, 7–8.*

### Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

### Proclaim the Gospel

**LEADER:** We have just learned what makes us strong in heart and soul—the Good News about Jesus Christ. Can you name the very first person to hear that Good News? Hint: the blessed person was a woman. Listen now to her story.

**LEADER:** The Lord be with you.

**CHILDREN:** And with your Spirit.

**LEADER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke.

**CHILDREN:** † Glory to you, O Lord.

**LEADER:** *Read Luke 1:26–38. Then say, "The Gospel of the Lord."*

**CHILDREN:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

### Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your homily.



- Mary first learned the good news about Jesus Christ from an angel. She learned that God wanted her to be Jesus' mother.
  - » Before she could say yes or no, the angel described what Jesus would be like. (Reread to the children Verses 32–33.)
  - » Now this all sounded fine and good, but Mary had a question: "How can this happen? I am not married!"
  - » What was the angel's answer? (Jesus will be born by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Nothing is impossible for God.")
- According to the angel, what other impossible thing had God already done? Hint: It was done for Mary's cousin Elizabeth. (God was giving Elizabeth a son, too, even though she was very old.)
- Do you know who Elizabeth's son grew up to be? Hint: We have been talking about him all during Advent. (Saint John the Baptist.)
- In the end, Mary said "yes" to God; she said, "I am the Lord's servant!"
  - » Now think back to what you said earlier about growing up to be a servant.
  - » Do you see that it's not a bad thing to be a servant—if you are God's servant?
- Mary proves an old saying, "God will not be outdone in generosity."
  - » It means that no matter how much you try to give God, God will always give back even more in return.
  - » Mary agreed to be God's servant, but in the end she was made queen of Heaven and earth.

### Profession of Faith

**LEADER:** Please stand and respond to each statement with, "This, I do believe." God is a loving Creator with a plan to save the world through Jesus. This, I do believe.

**CHILDREN:** This, I do believe.

**LEADER:** Jesus is the Son of God Most High and the Son of Mary. This, I do believe

**CHILDREN:** This, I do believe.

**LEADER:** By the power of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus was born of Mary. This, I do believe.

**CHILDREN:** This, I do believe.

**LEADER:** As the mother of Jesus, Mary is also the mother of the holy, catholic Church. This, I do believe.

**CHILDREN:** This, I do believe.

### Prayer of the Faithful

**LEADER:** Today in the Gospel we learned that if we become servants of God, we can do great things with our lives, just as Mary did with hers. So let us stand before God, ready to do all that God asks of us, and let us pray. Please respond to each petition with "Nothing is impossible for God." For the leaders of the Church, that they will be true servants of God, let us pray to the Lord.

**CHILDREN:** Nothing is impossible for God.

**LEADER:** For the people of our parish, that they will stay strong in the good news of Jesus Christ, let us pray to the Lord.

**CHILDREN:** Nothing is impossible for God.

**LEADER:** For all people on earth, that God's joyful message will reach them wherever they are, let us pray to the Lord.

**CHILDREN:** Nothing is impossible for God.

**LEADER:** Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:

Grant, we ask you, O Lord God, that we your servants may be blessed with continual health of soul and body, and that, through the prayers of the Blessed Mary ever virgin, we may be safe from present sorrows, and be brought to eternal joys, through Christ our Lord.

**CHILDREN:** Amen.

### Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.



# Leader's Checklist

NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
1 2 3 4	1 2	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3
5 6 7 8 9 10 11	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	7 8 9 10 11 12 13	4 5 6 7 8 9 10
12 13 14 15 16 17 18	10 11 12 13 14 15 16	14 15 16 17 18 19 20	11 12 13 14 15 16 17
19 20 21 22 23 24 25	17 18 19 20 21 22 23	21 22 23 24 25 26 27	18 19 20 21 22 23 24
26 27 28 29 30	24 25 26 27 28 29 30	28 29 30 31	25 26 27 28 29
	31		

SUNDAY	PREPARATIONS /PROPS	MUSIC	LECTOR	SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND	HOMILY PREP	CHILDREN'S LEAFLETS	OTHER
<b>11/26/23</b> Christ the King							
<b>12/3/23</b> 1st Advent							
<b>12/10/23</b> 2nd Advent							
<b>12/17/23</b> 3rd Advent							
<b>12/24/23</b> 4th Advent							
<b>12/31/23</b> Holy Family							
<b>1/7/24</b> Epiphany							
<b>1/14/24</b> 2nd OT							
<b>1/21/24</b> 3rd OT							
<b>1/28/24</b> 4th OT							
<b>2/4/24</b> 5th OT							
<b>2/11/24</b> 6th OT							
<b>2/18/24</b> 1st Lent							

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PUBLISHING GROUP

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**800-543-4383**

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