

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Children will discover that Christ invites them to live fully in his love by participating in the Eucharist.
- ◆ Children will recognize that God has called them since their Baptism to fully participate in the life of the Church.
- ◆ Children will name Baptism as the sacrament that makes them members of the Church family.
- ◆ Children will make the Sign of the Cross as it was made on the day of their Baptism.

Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn **as children of God**; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: “Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word” (CCC, 1213).

The **desire** for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for (CCC, 27).

Step Highlights

- ◆ **Step 1** is based on the Lord’s personal invitation to live as a disciple of Christ. It is based on the conviction that God loves everyone uniquely. Each person is called to live as a beloved child in God’s family and to put their life at the service of the Gospel for the salvation of all. “He who believes in Christ becomes a son of God. This filial adoption transforms him by giving him the ability to follow the example of Christ. It makes him capable of acting rightly and doing good” (CCC 1709).
- ◆ Hearing this call means listening to the Word of God. The Scripture passage at the heart of this step is the call of young Samuel, servant of the Lord, in the temple of Shiloh. Awakened from sleep by the sound of his first name, he is guided by Eli, the priest of the Temple, to recognize the voice of the Lord. God needs Eli so that Samuel can recognize God’s voice.
- ◆ With the story of Samuel’s call, young people are reminded that they have been called by God since Baptism. At the time of Baptism, the priest began the rite by asking the parents for the child’s first name. Each baptized person is called and chosen by Christ to live in freedom as a child of God.

The Sign of the Cross is always connected with the baptismal rite and echoes the moment when the celebrant makes the Sign of the Cross, receiving the child into the Church. To make the Sign of the Cross is to remember God’s great love for us.

Scripture Background

1 Samuel 3: 1-10, 19-21

Samuel, the Child of the Covenant, Hannah (his mother), and the Lord

In the town of Ramathaim, we meet Hannah, the second wife of Elkanah, who could not bear children.

While on pilgrimage to Shiloh, she addresses this prayer to God: “O Lord of hosts, if you look with pity on the hardship of your servant, if you remember me and do not forget me, if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life....” (1 Sam 1:11).

Hannah prays this so intensely that Eli, the priest of the temple, believes that she is drunk and reprimands her. Anne explains and Eli concludes: “Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you what you asked requested,” (1 Sam 1:17). Afterwards Hannah becomes pregnant and expresses her joy, both to have a son, and to give him to God. Her song of joy is known as *Hannah’s Song* (1 Sam 2:1-10). She names her son “Samuel,” which means: “God heard” (1 Sam 2:20). God makes a bargain with Hannah in a reciprocal gift: God gives her a son, and, in return, she gives God her child.

Eli, Priest of the Shrine of Shiloh

The Jewish people regularly came to the shrine of Shiloh to celebrate religious holidays or to offer sacrifices. Eli, the priest of this shrine, is already an old man. From the beginning, a play on words indicates a distance between God and him: “the word of the Lord was scarce and vision infrequent,”



(1 Sam 3:1). Indeed, how could a man whose “eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see” receive “visions”? Perhaps it is because of this distancing that Eli has to be awakened three successive times for him to finally understand that the Lord is calling Samuel. Eli fulfills his priestly functions, but he had strayed from God. His two sons Hophni and Phinehas, also priests in the temple of Shiloh, stole offerings and behaved promiscuously. Eli berates them but they don’t stop (1 Sam 2:12-25). It’s in this setting that little Samuel is entrusted to Eli by his mother Hannah, and “Samuel grew up in the service of the Lord” (1 Sam 2:21).

What’s Happening in this Story?

Eli sleeps in “his usual place,” while Samuel “was sleeping in the Temple.” The author specifies that the “lamp of God” was still on; it is the sign of the presence of God, a ray of hope. The Lord then calls

the child by his first name. However, the text specifies that Samuel ignores God because “the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Sam 3:7). Finally, after the third call, Eli invites Samuel to answer, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” Samuel says, “Speak, your servant is listening.” He omits the word “Lord.” From the moment that Samuel, guided by Eli, recognizes the voice of God in this call, he listens to God. God’s voice will guide his choices and his actions: “The Lord was

with him, not permitting any word of his to go unfulfilled.” Samuel becomes a prophet of the Lord. The text concludes with “the Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, manifesting himself to Samuel at Shiloh through his word.”

In this story of Samuel’s call, the Lord does not immediately confide a prophetic mission destined for the People of Israel to Samuel. However, this step marks an important turning point in the history of the Covenant between God and humanity: from then on, the Word of God was what mattered most. Through Samuel, God restores the covenant and makes manifest the presence of God alongside the people.

At the end of the war against the Philistines, Samuel is established as a judge over Israel. In 1 Sam 8, the Jewish people appeal to him, demanding a king. Listening to the Word of God, Samuel first anoints Saul, then King David.

Guided by faith

This Bible passage is well received by children, who can identify easily with Samuel. Stories involving children are rare in the Bible.

We notice that Samuel did not know the Lord when God first called, but he did have faith. In the first book of Samuel, Eli is not chosen as an instrument of God for his merit. His faith is even questioned. He is the one who makes the dialogue between God and Samuel possible. He plays the role of “elder in the faith” by guiding Samuel’s first words. Today, God still calls each young person by his or her first name, the first time being at his or her Baptism. The child’s parents had faith in God.

By frequently reading the Word of God and by being available to listen and pray, each child can enter into dialogue with God and continue the journey towards First Communion.

Materials

- ◆ A Bible in a prayer corner in the meeting room
- ◆ silhouettes of Benjamin and Sarah (printed on cardstock, if possible)
- ◆ pencils, markers/colored pencils
- ◆ luggage name tags
- ◆ digital device to play *Invited by Christ* playlist

For children with special needs:

- ◆ Pictograms to say your first name
- ◆ cut-outs of Samuel, Eli, lamp, and bed to act out the Bible story of “The Call of Samuel”

Pacing Guide

- 🕒 **25 minutes**
Gathering and Activity: Name Icebreaker Game and Luggage Tags
- 🕒 **20 minutes**
Scripture Story: The Call of Samuel (page 3-4)
- 🕒 **12 minutes**
God Calls You! (page 5)
- 🕒 **3 minutes**
Closing Prayer (page 5)



Let's Take the First Communion Bus Together!

Objective: Children will discover that Christ invites them to live fully in his love by participating in the Eucharist.

Gathering

- ◆ **Say:** “Welcome everyone! My name is __. We have been invited to go on an adventure to journey closer to Christ.”
- ◆ Have children open their workbooks to page 1. The catechist introduces the image of the First Communion Bus.
- ◆ **Say:** “Let’s take the First Communion Bus together! Why are we taking this road trip? We are on this journey to accept Jesus’ invitation to receive the gift of the Eucharist. We will learn and grow together so that you will be ready to encounter Christ at your First Reconciliation and your First Eucharist. Let’s meet Sarah and Benjamin, who will be our guides along the way.”

- ◆ **Introduce** Sarah and Benjamin on page 1 of the student workbook.
“Hello, my name is Sarah. My first name has Jewish roots, and it means ‘Princess.’”

“Hi, I’m Benjamin. My first name also comes from the Bible. It means ‘to be recognized as someone important to God.’”

“We are going to spend a lot of time together! Sarah and I will accompany you throughout your journey to your First Communion. Think of us as your guides!”

“What’s your name?” Ask each child to say their names to the rest of the group. Then, invite children to write their name on the line at the bottom of page 1.

Activity: Name Icebreaker Game and Luggage Tags

- ◆ **Say:** “When we go on an adventure together, it is important that we know each other’s names. Let’s play a game to get to know one another.”
- ◆ Depending on the age and size of the group, choose one of the provided icebreaker games.

Option for Younger Children: Say Hello

The children stand facing each other, in two rows of the same number of children. They move two by two, and go to meet one another (starting diagonally first from the ends, then from the center). The children shake hands, say “My name is...”, and go back to their seats. Play again using the same configuration, but this time, the children shake hands and say, “Your name is...” and then return to their places.

Option for Older Children: Zip Zap

The participants stand in a circle, around the catechist. The catechist designates a player by pointing to the young person and saying “Zip”; then, the designated player must give the first name of his neighbor on the right. If the companion says “Zap”, the player must give the first name of his neighbor on the left. When he says “Zip Zap”, all players switch places to form a new circle.

For and added challenge: if the catechist says “Zip Zip”, the player must designate the second player to his right; if he says “Zap Zap Zap”, the player chooses the third player to his left, etc.



From the Bible

WE'RE ON OUR WAY!

THE CALL OF SAMUEL

1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-21

When the young Samuel was the servant of the Lord under Eli, the word of the LORD was rare and visions weren't common. One day, Eli was asleep in his usual place. His eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see. The lamp of God was not yet extinguished, and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was. The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am." He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." "I did not call you," Eli answered. "Go back to sleep." So he went back to sleep.

Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called me." But he answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep." Samuel did not yet recognize the LORD, since the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me." Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and stood there, calling out as before: "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him and made everything that Samuel said come true. And all of Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba came to know that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, revealing himself to Samuel at Shiloh through his word. Samuel's word spread throughout Israel.

**Option for Children with Special Needs**

- ◆ For children with autism or for those who need visual supports: use the "Pictogram" sheet to invite the young person, along with their aide or caregiver, to say his or her first name.

Invite two children to volunteer to come up front to hold the cut-outs of Sarah and Benjamin. Then, you or the two children can role play and say:

Sarah: Do you remember preparing for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, Benjamin?

Benjamin: Yes, I still remember! We had a great group, and we have come a long way together.

Sarah: Yeah, I had some good friends, too. Now we get to accompany all of you on your journey to receive the Lord's forgiveness and encounter Jesus in the Eucharist!

Benjamin: The bus is ready—let's go!

- ◆ **Say:** "Everyone is invited to get on the bus. If you're ready, let's first prepare for this trip by making a luggage tag."

- ◆ Offer "a luggage tag" to each young person and invite them to write their first name on it. Punch a hole in the tag and tie a string to it. Have children wear it during their sessions.
- ◆ Finish by saying: "Our luggage tags are ready. We are getting to know each other a little better by learning each other's first names."

Option for Children with Special Needs

- ◆ Write the name of the child on the luggage tag. You can include a photo of the child as well, if you wish.

Scripture Story: The Call of Samuel

Objective: Children will recognize that God has called them since their Baptism to fully participate in the life of the Church.

- ◆ **Introduction:** "Your parents and your friends use your first name whenever they want to talk to you. Your first name makes you unique. God calls you, too, by your first name, just as he called a young boy, Samuel, a long time ago. Let's hear the story of The Call of Samuel."

Option for Younger Children

- ◆ Ask the children to turn to page 3 in their workbooks. **Say:** "Together, we will read this story from the Bible called The Call of Samuel." Read aloud 1 Sam 3:1-10, 19-21 as a group in the student workbook.
- ◆ Have the children to turn to page 4. Read the sentence in the orange box at the top of the page.
- ◆ In pairs or small groups, have the children retell the story of Samuel in their own words. The catechist can monitor the groups and assist children in retelling the story using simple questions, like: "Who are the characters? What are they doing? How does the story end?"
- ◆ Have children find the orange box at the bottom of the page. Invite a volunteer to read.
- ◆ Leave a short time for reflection. Help young people to identify anyone who has guided them on their faith journey, such as friends, family, godparents, priests, catechists, parishioners, etc.

Look at the comic strip, and retell the story of Samuel using your own words.



Eli helped Samuel recognize God's call. Who has helped you learn about Jesus?

4

Encourage everyone to share, but remember that not every child will know how to respond to the question.

Option for Older Children: Readers Theater

- ◆ Pass out the "Call of Samuel Reader's Theater" handouts. Assign roles to 5 volunteers. Everyone else follows along.
- ◆ Ask the young people to turn to page 3 in their workbooks. **Say:** "What we just read is based on a story from the Bible. Now, let's read this passage from Scripture." Have young people quietly read 1 Sam 3:1-10.19 on page 3.
- ◆ Examine this Scripture passage in depth by **asking:** "Where and when does the story take place? What do we know about the different characters at the start of this story? What is going on?" Use page 4 in the workbooks as a visual to help children remember the story.
- ◆ Have children find the orange box at the bottom of the page. Invite a volunteer to read.
- ◆ Leave a short time for reflection. Help young people to identify anyone who has guided them on their faith journey, such as friends, family, godparents, priests, catechists, parishioners, etc. Gently prompt young people to talk, but don't insist on their participation. (In this first sharing time, it is important that the catechist establishes an atmosphere of respectful listening.) After the young people have had a chance to share, the catechist can talk briefly about their own experience.

Option for Children with Special Needs

- ◆ Read the "Call of Samuel" from the Teaching Guide or the simplified version on the "Easy-to-Read Adaptation of the Call of Samuel" handout. Act out the story using the cut-out silhouettes of Samuel, his bed, Eli, and the lamp.
- ◆ With the "Call of Samuel Coloring Page," help the children discover the setting and the characters. Then have students color these elements according to the instructions on the coloring sheet.

God Calls You by Name!

Objectives:

- ◆ Children will name Baptism as the sacrament that makes them members of the Church family.
- ◆ Children will make the Sign of the Cross as it was made on the day of their Baptism.

Option for Younger Children

- ◆ Play the song "Sign of the Cross" (Burland).

- ◆ Invite children to sit. **Say:** "The song I am about to play will remind you of the moment when you became part of God's family. Listen to figure out when that was." Play song: "Belonging Through Baptism" (Burland).
- ◆ Ask a volunteer to guess what day they all became children of God. *The day of their Baptism.*
- ◆ Have children open their workbooks to page 5, and read the Catholic Faith Word *Baptism* at the bottom of the page. Read the title of the page to the children: *God Calls You!* Then, ask a volunteer to read the text under the title.

Say: "When you were baptized, the priest asked your parents what name they had chosen for you. Then the priest, your godfather and godmother, and your parents traced the Sign of the Cross on your forehead

God Calls You!

You have been called by God since your **Baptism!** The Sacrament of Baptism is the first step of your journey towards First Eucharist. Every baptized Catholic is called and chosen by Christ to live as a child of God. Baptism washes away our Original Sin—the sin we are born with that separates us from God. In Baptism, we receive the gift of sanctifying grace, which gives us new life in Christ and makes us members of the Church family.



PRAYER

*You see me, Lord, and you know me!
You know my every move.
You are deep in my heart.
From morning to evening
you accompany me.
Even before I speak, you know what
I'm going to say. Amen.*

Adapted from Psalm 139:1-4

CATECHISM Q&A

Q What happens when someone is baptized?

A Baptism takes away Original Sin. It allows us to share in the divine life of the Trinity through sanctifying grace, which makes us members of Christ and the Church. It gives us a share in the priesthood of Christ and unity with all Christians. We receive theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. A baptized person belongs forever to Christ (1262–1274, 1279–1280).



WITH MY FAMILY Discuss

Talk with your child about why he or she wants to prepare for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Write down your child's response on a piece of paper, and place it somewhere where your child can see it daily.

STEP 1

Called by God

5

Making the Sign of the Cross with holy water reminds us of our Baptism and God's love for us!

Catholic Faith Word

BAPTISM—The sacrament that makes us children of God and members of God's family, the Church.

to show that you have been claimed by Christ.”

◆ Have children point to Benjamin. Then have a volunteer read his speech bubble: “Making the Sign of the Cross with holy water reminds us of our Baptism and God’s love for us.”

◆ **Say:** Just like Samuel responded to the Lord by saying “Here I am,” we respond to God’s call to live a Christian life by making the Sign of the Cross. It is a sign that we belong to Christ and to his Church. It also shows that we believe in the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”

◆ Practice making the Sign of the Cross with the children. (It may be helpful for you to use your opposite hand when modeling, so as to mirror this gesture for the children.)

Closing Prayer

- ◆ Prepare everyone for prayer by **saying:** “Let us enter into prayer together. By making the Sign of the Cross in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we remember our Baptism. May the Holy Spirit fill us with joy and help us to say thank you to God our Father.”
- ◆ Make the Sign of the Cross.
- ◆ Ask children to find the orange prayer box on page 5 of their workbooks. Invite children to **pray** these adapted psalm verses with you out loud.

Additional Exercises

- ◆ **With the Family:** At home this week, parents will discuss with their child about why he or she wants to prepare for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. They will then write down the child’s response and display it in the home.
- ◆ **Parent Meeting:** A parent meeting is suggested between Steps 1 and 2. This meeting allows adults to explore how the Eucharist unites the People of God and helps us live in communion with one another as the Church, the Body of Christ.

With the Parish (between the first and second steps):

At Sunday Mass, the celebrant or catechist calls each young person by his or her first name. For a large number of children, combine the call of four or five names at or invite families on several Sundays. Each young person is welcomed by parishioners, and the parish community is invited to support children by praying for them on the journey to First Communion.

SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR CELEBRANT/ CATECHIST AT SUNDAY MASS

Today, young people in our parish want to begin a journey towards First Eucharist. The Church gladly welcomes their request.

(First names are called)

Dear young people, since your Baptism, your families and your catechists have helped you to know Jesus Christ. This year, you are starting a new path which will lead you to receive the Lord in the Eucharist. Our community is happy to know you by name and throughout your preparation, we will pray for you by asking the Lord to guide you as you press onward to meet him.