



People of Color Who Inspire: Additional Stories from the Communion of Saints

The Center for the Theology of Childhood

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An imaginative method for nurturing the spiritual lives of children

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Extension Lesson

Introduction

People of Color Who Inspire is a collection of stories written to supplement the collection of stories about the saints in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*. In the collection of lessons on the saints found in Volume 7, there is a lesson called, “The Child’s Own Saint.” The lesson invites the children and Godly Play mentors in a Godly Play room to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. This story, and the others in this collection, serves as an example of this—a Christian person who inspires us all to strive for justice and respect the dignity of every human being.

These stories are for children, so they try to minimize the distance between the child and the adult we are talking about. Some of the ways this is done is to keep the relationship informal, such as calling the person by their first name and emphasizing things about the person’s childhood. This means that the stories are somewhat open and very personal to engage the child’s intimacy and wonder with these amazing people who inspire.

We are intentionally spare with the details of these stories so as not to obscure the core reality. However, we encourage Godly Play mentors to include children’s books on the shelves nearby, just as we do with the other heroes of the church.

Beautifully crafted materials for telling Godly Play stories, including this lesson, are available from Godly Play Resources. A link to the store is found at www.godlyplayfoundation.org.

Godly Play is an interpretation of Montessori religious education developed by Jerome Berryman. It is an imaginative approach for working with children that supports, challenges, nourishes, and guides their spiritual quest. It is more akin to spiritual guidance than what we generally think of as children’s education. It involves children and adults, as mentors, moving together toward fluency in the art of knowing how to use Christian language to nourish their spiritual lives.

Godly Play assumes that children have some experience of the mystery of the presence of God in their lives, but that they lack the language, permission, and understanding to express and fully enjoy that in our culture. In Godly Play, we show how to enter into parables, silence, sacred stories, and liturgical action in order to discover the depths of God, ourselves, one another, and the world around us.

If you are not an experienced Godly Play mentor, we strongly encourage you to first download and read *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons*, available at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. This will explain the background of Godly Play, its methodology, and clear guidelines for its use. You will need this grounding before attempting to lead a Godly Play presentation, such as this one, or establishing a Godly Play program in your church or school. We also recommend attending a Godly Play Foundation training. A schedule of training can be found at www.godlyplayfoundation.org.

There are additional Godly Play resources available from Church Publishing Incorporated at the website from which this lesson was downloaded. You will find these at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. All of the stories can also be found within the printed eight volumes of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, found at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplayprint. You will also find a number of books by Jerome Berryman about the spirituality of children, as well as the Godly Play method, at www.churchpublishing.org.

Enjoy the wonder of Godly Play, and blessings on you and the ones you lead in this transformative experience!

Extension Lesson

The Story of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

(Born January 15, 1929–Died April 4, 1968)

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that Black Americans would not be discriminated against on the basis of color. He courageously traveled the country to make this dream come true.

How to Use This Lesson

- Extension Lesson—to be used after the children are fluent in the Core Lesson called “Introduction to the Saints” (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7, Lesson 1*)
- Afterwards Lesson—stories about things and events that took place after the biblical era
- This lesson is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together, the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

The Material

- Location: The Mystery of Pentecost shelf, next to St. Thomas Aquinas (whom we remember in January)
- Pieces: Saint tray, table, bus, red wooden heart, four people of God (all dark shades of wood)
- Underlay: green

Background

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, the second of three children. We generally remember saints or heroes on the day they died, but since Dr. King’s Birthday is a National Holiday in the United States, we will remember him on his birthday. His father and grandfather were the pastors of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta before him.

Dr. King's given name was Michael (after his father). In 1934 his father traveled with a group of Baptist ministers to the Holy Land and Germany. "Daddy King" was so impressed while visiting sites concerning Martin Luther that he changed his name and that of his five-year-old son to honor the German monk who began the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. descended from enslaved people on his mother's side of the family, the Williams. They had been owned by the Williams Plantation in Penfield, Greene County, Georgia. It is likely that his father's side of the family were also enslaved, but this cannot be shown conclusively. Both families were sharecroppers after the Civil War before moving to Atlanta.

Dr. King attended segregated schools in Atlanta and graduated early at the age of 15. He then attended Morehouse College, a well-known, all male college for Black Americans in Atlanta, where many of his relatives on both sides of the family graduated. He went on to study at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, where in 1951 he was the seminary's first Black American graduate. He then studied systematic theology at Boston University, where he graduated with a Ph.D. in 1955. His thesis compared the conceptions of God in the thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman.

He met Coretta Scott in Boston. She had graduated from Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and was then studying voice and violin at the New England Conservatory of Music. On June 18, 1953, 16 months after they met, Coretta Scott and Dr. King were married by King's father, "Daddy King," on the lawn of Coretta Scott's parents' home in Marion, Alabama.

Dr. King and his wife moved to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1954, where he served the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. It had been founded in 1877 in a slave trader's pen. By this time, he was a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization the Baptist ministers on both sides of his family had been part of. He was fast becoming a leader in the civil rights movement. Dr. King had studied Gandhi's non-violent approach for a long time and finally visited India for a month in 1959 with Mrs. King. He believed, like Gandhi, that the peaceful refusal to obey unjust laws was the best way to bring about lasting social change.

On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks, a Black woman, refused to give up her seat on the bus to a White person in Selma, Alabama, and was arrested. She had broken the law. The local chapter of the NAACP met with Dr. King and other community members to arrange a boycott of the bus system. Dr. King was chosen to speak to the community and this speech started his

career on the road to lead many protests against unfair laws. From 1957 to 1968 he traveled over six million miles, spoke over 2,500 times for equal justice, and organized non-violent protests under extreme pressure. In 1963 Dr. King worked with others to organize the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom that involved some 250,000 people. This was when he gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, which took only 17 minutes, but still resonates around the world.

Before his life was over, he was arrested 29 times for protesting against the unequal treatment of Black Americans and the lack of opportunities for poor people of all races. He was both loved and hated by many. He and his family were the victims of violence by White supremacists and others on many occasions, most notably when his house in Montgomery was bombed. He was stabbed at a book signing in Harlem by a mentally ill Black woman in 1958 and almost died. This convinced him more than ever that non-violent action was the way forward. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 when he was 35.

The Civil Rights Law was passed in 1964 and the next year the Voting Rights Law was passed. Dr. King’s work shifted from changing laws to addressing the socio-cultural issues underlying the laws. Black Americans might have the legal right to enter places they hadn’t been able to during segregation, but they didn’t have the money to buy anything. Black soldiers were sent 8,000 miles away to Southeast Asia to fight for the benefits of democracy they didn’t have at home. A Black person might have the legal right to vote, but it was too dangerous to do so. Human dignity was difficult to maintain when one was constantly under the threat of violence. When Dr. King went to Memphis on March, 1968 to lead the sanitation workers’ strike, he still advocated for nonviolence, but he lost control of the crowd after they marched the first several blocks. A riot took place.

On Thursday, April 4, 1968, Dr. King was standing on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, visiting with friends. They were still in Memphis to lead the sanitation workers to seek better working conditions and better pay. James Earl Ray shot him from a rooming house across the street. Ray had been dishonorably discharged from the army, jailed on many occasions, and was a convicted felon.

Rioting broke out, but on April 8 a completely silent march was led in Memphis by members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Coretta Scott King, and the United Auto Workers president, Walter Reuther, with 42,000 participants. This ended the strike successfully without further rioting.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was buried in Atlanta, where he was born. Mrs. King was buried with him in 2006 at “The King Center,” which she had founded after Dr. King’s death. They were survived by their four children.

Notes on the Material

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s story sits on a small, shallow tray about six inches square, with sides about two inches deep. It has a groove in the front to slide the “saint booklet” in so the children can see it when they approach the Mystery of Pentecost Shelf.

The booklet is 5" × 4.25". The cover has an image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on it. The second page has a map of the world with the United States highlighted as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s home. It also has an image of the flag of the United States. The third page has a time line beginning with the year 1 CE and ending with the year 2500 CE. It has an arrow indicating when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived. The rest of the book contains the story of his life.

Objects are placed behind the booklet to help us remember his story. The objects are a table, a bus, a red heart, and four people of God (all dark shades of wood). The underlay is a 12-inch square piece of green felt and is folded on top of the objects.

Special Notes

In the collection of lessons on the saints found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*, there is a lesson called, “The Child’s Own Saint.” The lesson invites the children in a Godly Play Room to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is one such hero—a Christian person who inspires us all to strive for justice and respect the dignity of every human being.

These stories are for children, so they try to minimize the distance between the child and the adult we are talking about. Some of the ways this is done is to keep the relationship informal and emphasize things about the person’s childhood. This means that the stories are somewhat open and very personal to engage the child’s intimacy and wonder with these amazing people who inspire.

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Movements

Go and get the material for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s story.

Unfold the green underlay in front of you and say:

Take the booklet from the tray and place it in the center of the underlay with Martin Luther King's image facing up and toward the children.

*Place the **dinner table** on the underlay.*

Words

Watch where I go to get the lesson for today.

This is the story of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. We remember him during the time of the color green.

Martin was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. His mother and father called him Michael after his father, but when he was five his father changed both their names to "Martin Luther King" to honor the great German Reformer from the 16th century. That German reformer fought to make the world better, and Martin and his father did too.

Martin had an older sister and younger brother. His father gathered the family for dinner every night at 6:00 pm and led them in lively discussions about God and the world. "Daddy King" felt it was important to discuss serious things with his children, even when they were very young. They often talked about how all people should be treated with respect.

Martin's mother also talked with the children about important things. When Martin was six, his best friend, who was White, told him that his parents said they couldn't play together anymore. This confused Martin. He became sad and angry. His mother took him on her lap and told him about slavery and prejudice. "Prejudice" is when someone doesn't like you just because they don't like the color of your skin. She reminded him that there are places in the Bible where the people of God overcame slavery and prejudice. He could too.

Movements

Place **the bus** on the underlay.

Words

When Martin grew up, he became a Baptist minister like his father and grandfather. He also studied for many years, and became a Doctor of Theology. That's why he is known as "Dr. King." He also worked hard for the dream that Black Americans would no longer be treated differently because of the color of their skin.

No one knew how real change might begin, until one day in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. A Black woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus for a White person. This changed everything.

In those days, buses were divided into White, mixed, and Black sections. Rosa Parks was sitting in the mixed section, but by law Black people still had to move to the back of the bus when told to. The bus driver told her to move to make room for some White people who got on the bus. The other Black people moved, but Rosa didn't. She wasn't tired, she said, only tired of giving in to unjust laws. She was arrested and Black Americans became angry when they heard about it.

Dr. King helped the Black people of Montgomery fight back peacefully. They stopped taking the bus. This way the bus company lost money. Black people walked to work for 381 days, sometimes many miles.

Do you know what happened? The city changed the law that forced Black people to sit in the back of the bus. They could sit anywhere they wanted to. This was the first of many protests Dr. King organized that changed America forever.

Movements

Place **the red heart** (for courage, love, and peace) on the underlay.

Place **four people of God**—all dark shades of wood.

Words

Working for change is never easy. It takes courage and faith. Many people were mean to Dr. King and his family. Someone tried to blow up their house. Many tried to scare them with their words, but also with knives and guns. Dr. King was arrested and placed in jail 29 times for trying to change things by protesting against unjust laws.

In 1963 a huge crowd of people came to Washington, D.C. to march for jobs and freedom. That's when Dr. King made his most famous speech.

He said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not to be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." This was also the year when he won the Nobel Peace Prize at age 34. The next year the Civil Rights Act turned his dream into law, and the next year the Voting Rights Act was passed, but there was still more work to be done.

Dr. King continued to travel the country working for change until one day in 1968 he was killed. He was in Memphis, Tennessee, to lead another protest. He was buried in Atlanta, where he was born.

We remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. because of his dream that Black Americans will be treated the same as everyone else and because he courageously traveled everywhere to make this dream come true.

Movements

Guide the wondering about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life by using these wondering questions.

Show the children the booklet. Point out the map of the world showing where Dr. King lived, the flag of the country, the time line showing when he lived, and the story printed in the booklet to help the children remember Dr. King.

Model how to place the lesson back on the tray and then carry it back to its spot on the shelf.

Words

I wonder what parts of Dr. Martin Luther King's story you like the best?

I wonder what part of the story is the most important?

I wonder what part of the story is about you or where you might be in the story?

I wonder if we could leave any part of the story out and still have all the story we need?

Let me show you what is inside this booklet and how you can use it to remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Now let me show you how to put the story away.

Here is the **table** that helps us remember the important times he and his family sat around the dinner table talking about serious things.

Here is the **bus** that helps us remember how Martin organized a protest about what happened to Rosa Parks to change the unjust rule that Black people had to always sit in the back of the bus.

Here is the **red heart** that reminds us of Martin's great courage and love of peace.

Here are the **People of God** who remind us of Martin's dream that his children, and people everywhere, would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

Movements

Return to your spot on the circle and begin to dismiss the children to their work.

Words

Now, I wonder what you would like to make for your work today? It might be something about this story, or another story you have heard, or something else. Only you know what is right for you.



Instructions for Printing Booklet

Print booklet on photo paper (8.5 × 14).

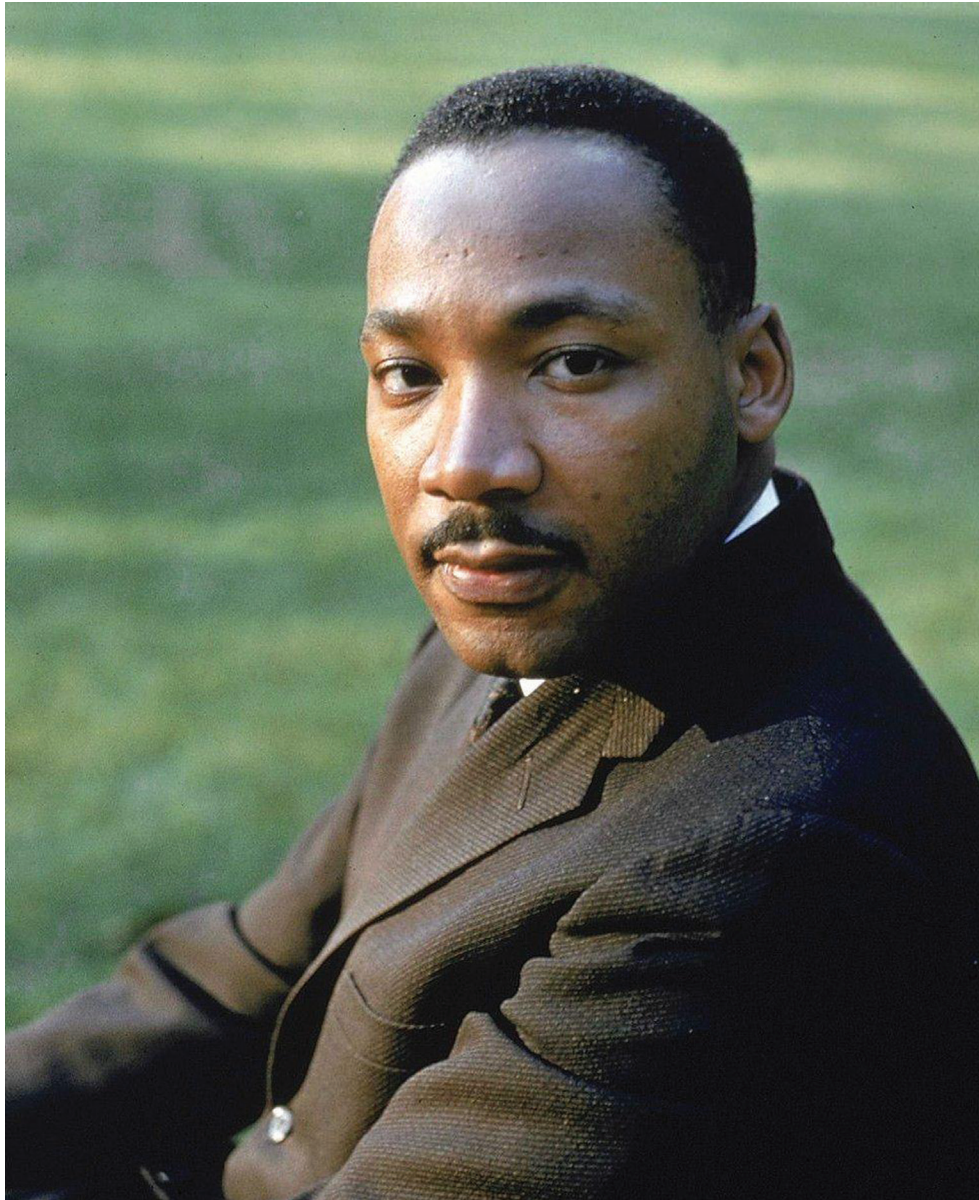
Print in booklet mode, portrait.

Fold both pages in half.

Trim to fit in stand.

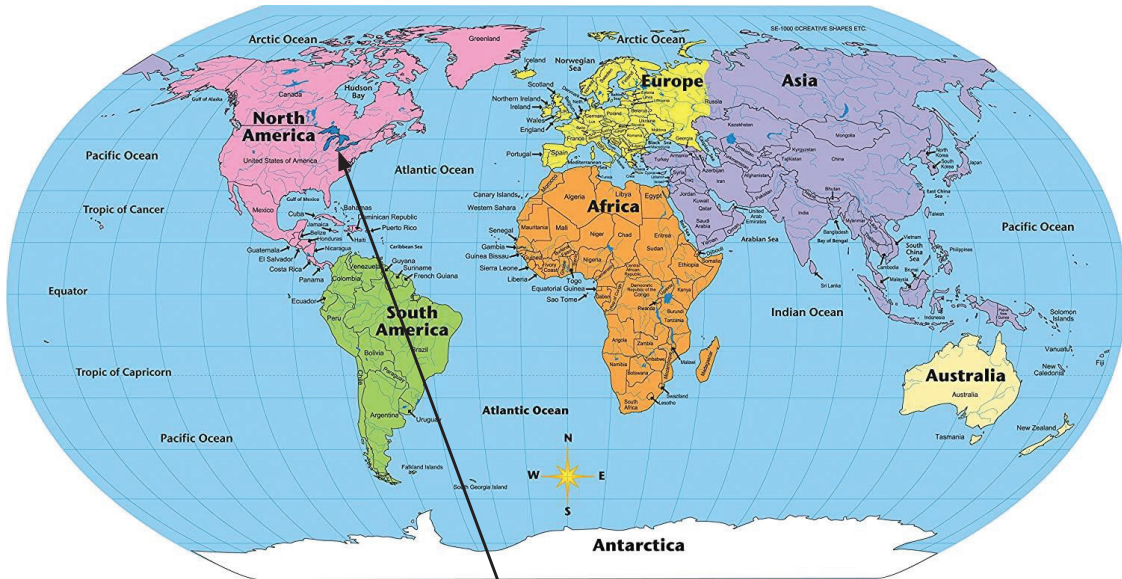
- 1.5" off the bottom
- 1" off the top
- ½" off the right side

Staple on the fold in two places.

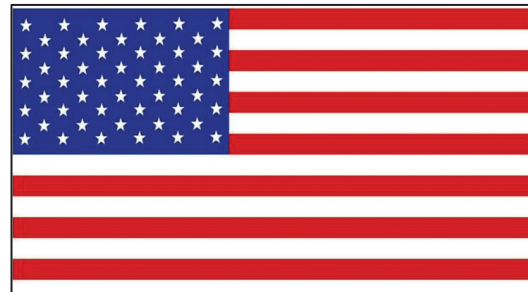


THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Martin

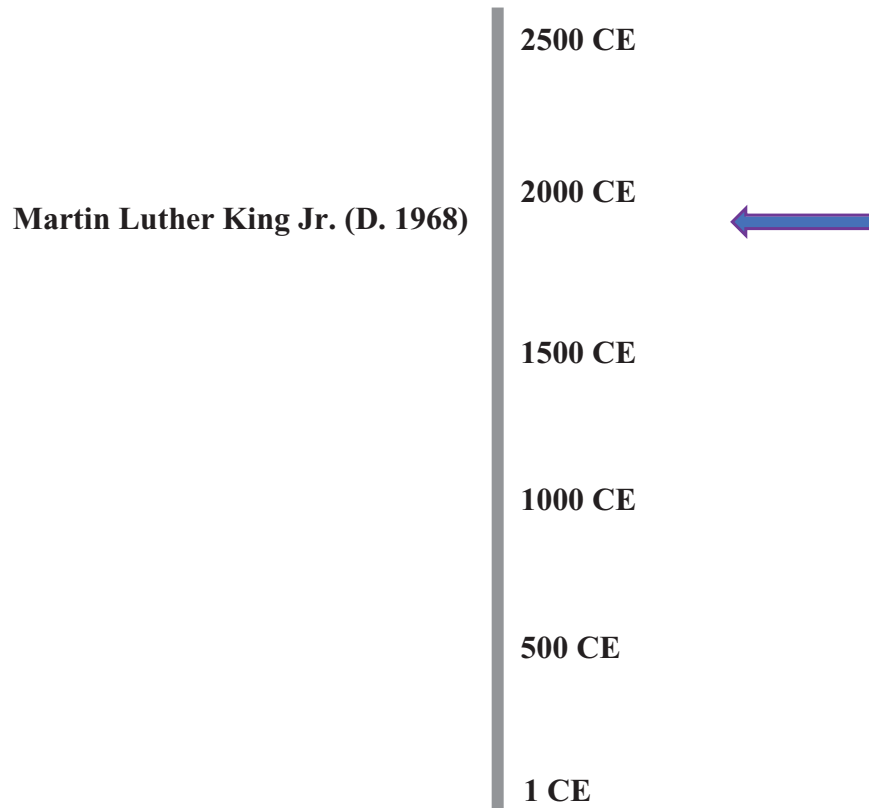


The United States, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Country



The Flag of the United States

Luther King Jr.



The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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