

River Sunday

In this week's readings, we witness God's interaction with creation through water, from covenanting to prevent annihilating floods, to providing eternal life-giving water. The texts remind us of the power of water and of God. They invite us to recognize the importance of water and to seek ways to protect it as a means of honouring God.

Focus scripture: Revelation 22:1–5

Revelation 22:1–5 concludes John's vision of the New Jerusalem. The city descends from heaven offering the water of life to all within its gates. The water flows out from the throne of God through the centre of the city, highlighting the importance of water in our eternal life with God. On the banks of the river grows the tree of life, whose leaves offer healing to the nations that have experienced hardship under the Roman Empire. Here, believers experience the power of nature to provide safety, healing, and intimate connection with the Divine. The passage reminds believers that life with God centres upon and incorporates all of creation, not just humanity.

While this image serves as a promise of renewal and fullness of life for all of creation, it also requires close examination by readers. John's vision of abundance and life excludes all those left outside of the New Jerusalem. Access to necessary resources is limited to those who fit within John's view of right belief in God. The passage raises questions about who has access to life-giving water and resources for healing both within the walled city and in our world today.

Genesis 8:20–22, 9:12–17 recounts the covenant God makes with Noah following the great flood. The flood displayed the deadly power of water to destroy all living things. But the covenant stands as a reminder of the mutual responsibility that God and humanity hold for preserving creation against such destructive forces. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, covenants were sacred oaths made between two parties. They were based on each party promising to perform an action or

to uphold a promise at the threat of a curse or punishment. In this case, Noah provides pleasing worship of God, and God promises never to destroy creation by flood again. The rainbow remains a sign of the ongoing continuation of this covenant and serves as a call to continue to respect and protect the powerful force of water.

Psalm 104:27–33 highlights the precariousness and cyclical nature of life. The psalmist witnesses to God's power and presence within creation, providing abundance and hardship. In the end, God's awesome spirit of creation and renewal offers hope and garners praise.

Matthew 28:1–10 highlights the impact of Jesus's resurrection. The Good News is not limited to humanity. Instead, all creation participates. At the resurrection, Earth quakes as the angel descends from heaven. The angel's appearance is not otherworldly; instead, it resembles natural elements of lightning and snow. The message of the resurrection brings new life and hope, not only for Mary Magdalene, Mary, and the other disciples, but for all of creation.

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Revelation offers a vision of a redeemed world in which the city and the land are brought together at the fertile banks of the waters of life. It's a vision of a restored world co-created by humans and God. Such a world is dependent on our willingness to "not be afraid" and release the anxiety that feeds the desire for domination. In a world that uses fear of scarcity to drive consumption, how can we share God's abundance more freely?

Season of Creation (Year A)

Focus scripture
Revelation 22:1–5

Additional scriptures
Genesis 8:20–22;
9:12–17
Psalms 104:27–33
Matthew 28:1–10



Resources based on
semi-continuous

readings of the *Revised Common*

Lectionary can be found online at

www.seasonsonline.ca/RCLresources

Water of Life, you are our source of renewal and strength. Help us to become vessels carrying your life-giving water to restore all of creation. Grant us the courage to challenge forces that harm, and to joyfully spread your message of new life. Amen.

Lection Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Water, in its many forms, is an everyday part of each child's life. Bodies of water often hold an almost irresistible attraction to most children in this age group. Older children in this age group will probably be learning about the problems of water pollution and conservation at school.

This year's Season of Creation concludes with a focus on Rivers and a vision from the book of Revelation. Children are familiar with images of fantastical creation through books and movies, which can help them engage with the images and descriptions in John's vision. This may be the first time the children in your

group have encountered apocalyptic writing. Those children who still think concretely may hear the passage as a literal description. Older children are developing abstract thinking skills and can begin to recognize the allegory of the text.

Most children in the group, with a little encouragement, will be able to articulate what a perfect world might look like. Pray that the children's imaginations will be stirred by the images in John's vision and that they will be excited by the ways in which God's love brings life and healing.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Revelation 22:1–5, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 27).
- Set a worship space with aqua cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark in focus passage, and bowl of water.
- Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- Bring, if possible, the song "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Engage

- Bring resource sheet "[A Special River](#)" and a bowl of water with clear glass pebbles.
- Puzzle group:** copies of resource sheet "[An Amazing Dream](#)"
- Research group:** copies of resource sheet "[Apocalyptic Writing](#)" (p. 102)
- Bring large circle of blue poster board and used magazines.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- Creation zone:** newspapers
- Game zone:** resource sheet "[Season of Creation Games](#)" (p. 100), two large containers (one filled with water) and a small container or bucket for each child
- Art zone:** drawing paper, water-based crayons, watercolour paints, sponges, brushes, containers of water
- Craft zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Wire Sculptures](#)," wire (floral wire for younger children), wire cutters, beads (optional)
- Outreach zone:** invite a volunteer with the church's outreach committee to bring information about denominational water projects and ministries; option: poster board and art supplies.

Bless

- Bring, if possible, song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



River Sunday

Scripture
Revelation
22:1-5

FOCUS To hear John's vision and imagine a world overflowing with God's love and healing

Gather

Welcome the children and explain that this is the last Sunday in the Season of Creation, a time when we have celebrated God's beautiful creation. Introduce any newcomers to the group.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and point out the aqua cloth, a colour that reminds us of the green-blue colour of the planet Earth. Explain that this is River Sunday, a day to wonder what the rivers of the world might have to say to us.

Lead the group in the following litany:

Leader: Come, let us celebrate God!

(Invite a child to light the candle.)

God created the rivers of the world.
(Invite a child to place the bowl of water beside the candle.)

God gives life and breath to everything.

All: Thank you, God!

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray *(Invite children to repeat each line after you.)*

Creator God,
we thank you for water and rivers, and
all that you have made. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to think about rivers that they know about, or have seen in books or movies. Encourage them to talk about their experiences of rivers and things that they did, or would like to do, in a river.

- **When you spend time beside a river what might you smell, see, and hear?**
- **How is being on a river different from being on land?**

Explain that in this week's Bible story they will hear a story about a dream, or vision, about a very special river.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Revelation. Notice that it is the very last book of the Bible. Explain that at the time of the early church, small groups of believers met together in each other's homes to share a meal, worship, and learn more about Jesus. Sometimes they read letters of encouragement they had received from church leaders. The part of the book of Revelation that we will read today is like a letter of encouragement and the writer describes a dream of what the world can be like when it is filled with God's love.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[A Special River](#)," which includes **Revelation 22:1-5**, to tell the story. At the end of the story, invite children to take a glass pebble from the bowl as a reminder of the river in John's dream.

Wondering Invite discussion on the following questions:

- **What hope do you see in John's dream about the river?**
- **What are some places in our world that need God's healing and love?**

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Puzzle group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to find a hidden message about John's vision of the river of life. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[An Amazing Dream](#)" and review the instructions together to complete the word search and find the hidden message. (Answer: God's love flows like a river through creation.) Encourage discussion of the questions at the bottom of the sheet.

Research group *(for older children)* This group will learn about the type of writing used in Revelation. Distribute the copies of the resource sheet "[Apocalyptic Writing](#)" (p. 102) and practice saying the word together. Then ask volunteers to read aloud the information about this special style of writing. Ask the group to find Revelation 22:1-5 in their Bibles and look for the symbols used in this passage. What is "revealed" or "unveiled" in this vision?

Reporting Invite the puzzle group to name the hidden message and invite the research group to share what they have discovered about apocalyptic writing.

The Bible story and us

River collage Look at the collages of Forest, Land, and Wilderness/Outback created during the last three weeks. Invite children to create a final "River collage" by tearing out coloured pieces of paper from magazines to glue onto the blue poster board circle to form a river scene. (Note: there is no need to make an actual picture, just make a blend of colours to suggest an area of wilderness.)

As they work, invite children to think about the rivers that are in your area or rivers that they have seen during travels with their families.

On this Sunday, we listen to the voice of the Rivers.

- **What might the rivers of the world say about God?**
- **What might they be asking us to do to help care for this part of creation?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Creation zone: Visual prayers** John's vision in Revelation describes the river of the water of life nourishing the tree of healing for the hurts and sorrows of the world. Invite children to create a visual prayer for healing by cutting leaf shapes from newspapers and writing on these some names, places, countries, or parts of creation in need of God's healing. Arrange the leaves on the floor forming a pathway and walk slowly as a group down the path, pausing to read each "leaf prayer" aloud. Then say "Amen."
- **Game zone: Water relay** John used the image of a river to describe God's love and healing. Water plays an important part in all of our lives. Invite children to learn more about the work of carrying water in some countries, work that often falls to children. Set up the materials and follow the directions on the resource sheet "[Season of Creation Games](#)" (p. 100) to play the "Water carry" game.



- **Art zone: Water painting** God's love flows like a river through all creation and through us. Distribute paper and sponges and show the children how to gently wipe a damp sponge across the paper to make it damp but not dripping. Then have them use water-based crayons or watercolours and paintbrushes to add strokes of colour across the paper, watching it swirl and flow. Encourage them to choose one or two other colours to stroke across the paper, watching the colours flow and mix together, creating an image of a flowing river. Allow the paintings to dry and display with a title chosen by the children. (Note: it is best to limit the number of colours to three to avoid excessive bleeding.)
- **Craft zone: Sculptures** John's vision paints a vivid word picture of God's love as it brings healing and life to the world. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Wire Sculptures](#)" and materials and invite children to create sculptures that speak to them of God's healing love flowing through creation. Be available to help children in cutting wires as needed.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Water ministries** Water can sometimes create problems for people through floods; a lack of water can also threaten lives. Invite your guest to talk about the ministries of your denomination that help to address these kinds of situations.

Have the children work together to create a poster or write an article for the church website or newsletter about these outreach ministries.



Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song “The Peace of the Earth” (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Invite children to repeat each line after you:
Thank you, God, for the rivers in our world.
May we remember that we are part
of a giant web of creation. Amen.

Blessing Offer the following blessing: “Always remember that God’s love flows through you like a river.”

Reflect

Think back over the past four weeks. What have the children learned about creation? In what ways have you seen the children developing a greater sense of kinship with God’s creation?



A Special River

including Revelation 22:1–5

Props can fire up a child's imagination, if they do not intrude on the storytelling. Rehearse with them so you can use them easily.

At the beginning of creation, God gathered the water together into rivers, lakes, and seas. On this River Sunday, we think about rivers. Rivers can be wide or narrow, deep or shallow, full of fish, crowded with boats, or flowing slowly by. But rivers can also be so powerful that they carve deep canyons in the mountains.

Wherever they flow, they bring the gift of water – the gift of life. Plants and animals live by rivers and depend upon the water they bring. In some rivers, families dip out drinking water and cooking water. In other rivers, children play and swim. Rivers are a special gift from God.

But God's idea of a river is more special than we might imagine. Long, long ago, a follower of Jesus named John had an amazing dream, a vision sent from God. At the end of this dream,

John had a vision of a beautiful river, with water that sparkled with life. John's vision was so special that John wrote it all down. This is the part about the river:

An angel showed me the river. Its water was the water of life. It sparkled like crystal jewels as it flowed from the throne of God right through the street in the middle of the town.

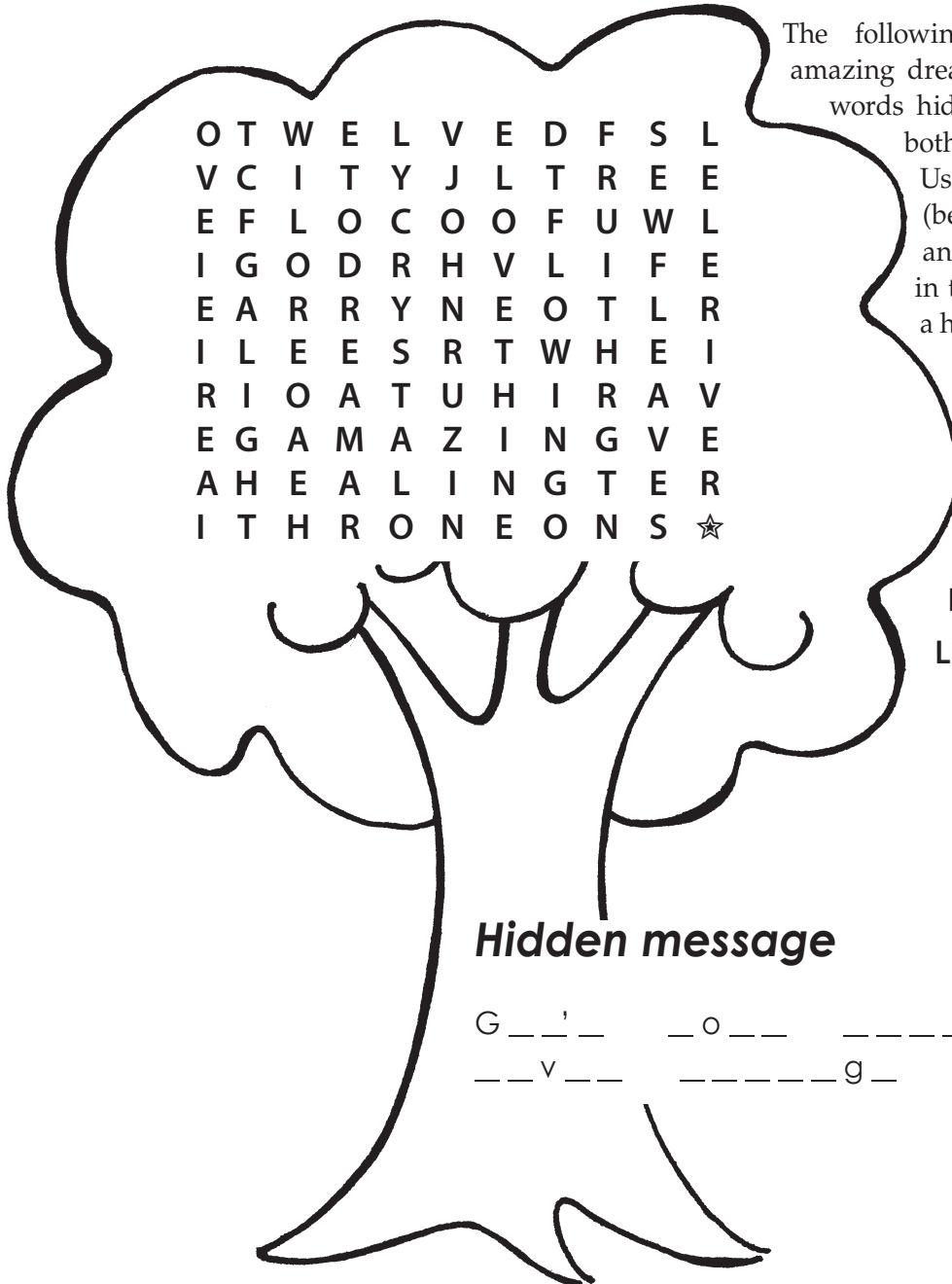
On the banks of the river grew two amazing trees, one on each side. This was the tree of life. It produced twelve kinds of fruit, all on that one tree. One fruit grew for each month of the year. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations of the world. With these two trees, hunger and war are removed from the earth. Instead, we will see God and we will worship God. Night will be no more. Yet we will not need a lamp or the sun either. God will be our light forever.

Imagine such a wonderful river, a river overflowing with God's love. Now you know why John wanted to write his dream down. We can remember John's dream and think about what it means today.

(Pass the bowl of water for the children to take a clear pebble.)



AN AMAZING DREAM



The following words describe John's amazing dream about a river. Find the words hidden in the puzzle (looking both horizontally and vertically). Use the remaining letters (beginning from the top left, and reading from left to right) in the spaces below to discover a hidden message.

- River Tree Fruit
- Healing Leaves
- Throne City Twelve
- Life Crystal God
- Dream John Flowing
- Light Love Amazing

Hidden message

G _ _ ' _ _ _ o _ _ _ _ _ s _ _ k _ _
 _ _ v _ _ _ _ _ g _ _ c _ _ _ _ _ .



What do you think a world overflowing with God's love would look like?

When we act in loving ways, God's love flows through us. What might you do this week to show God's love?



Wire Sculptures

Materials

- Wire
- Wire cutters
- Optional: beads

Where to find wire?

All wire is sculpture wire! Try florist wire or paddle wire, picture wire, beading wire, and even pipe cleaners. Thin wire covered with plastic can also be used. A craft store is a good place to look for wire, but you will find all kinds of inexpensive options in the hardware store as well.

How to get started?

When it comes to wire sculpture, there is only one rule: "Don't put anyone's eye out!" This means work with short pieces (30 cm/12 in or less) and keep the wire close to the table. Do not wave wire around.

Start with three or four pieces of wire. Experiment to see what you can do with them.

- Try looping, twisting, and wrapping your wire until you have created something you like.
- Try making shapes or pictures with the wire as though you were drawing with a pencil.
- Experiment to see how many ways you can attach the wire to itself.
- What happens when you combine two or more layers?
- Add beads or other embellishments, if you wish.

If you are not satisfied with the results, simply unravel everything and start again.

How might you use the wire to convey God's healing love flowing through creation?

You might:

- create a sculpture that speaks to you of flowing water
- create a wire "drawing" of the healing leaves
- use wire to sculpt the tree of life.



To learn more about wire sculptures visit the "Wire Lady." Go to www.seasonsonline.ca, and click the Links tab. See links for September 20, 2020.

Season of Creation Games

September 6 – Web of connection

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Hold the loose end of the ball of yarn, and throw the ball to a child. Invite her or him to hold on to the yarn, call out her or his name, the identity of her or his forest friend, and throw the ball to someone else. Keep going until everyone is holding a piece of the yarn that is taking on the shape of the web. Look at the web and marvel at the amazing way that everyone and all the forest friends are connected. Repeat the process with the

children naming other people they know (such as family or friends) or the names of other things you might find in the forest. Look at the growing web of connections and observe that we are connected to each other and the whole of God's creation. Run the yarn several times around the outside of the circle. Explain that this reminds us of what we heard in the story. God is very close. God is deep inside and all around.

September 13 – Caring for the land

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Hold up a small beach ball and explain that it is a reminder of our beautiful planet Earth with all its different landscapes. Invite children to begin tossing the ball around the circle. Whenever someone catches the ball,

ask him or her to offer a suggestion of one way that we can care for the land. After each suggestion encourage the whole group to say, "That's a great way to live in harmony with the land!"

September 20 – Sad ways, God's ways

Arrange the chairs in a circle and invite children to stand in a circle around them. Point out the chair marked with a sad face and chair marked with happy face. Play a recording of music and encourage the children to dance around the chairs. When the music stops, each player must sit on the chair nearest to her or him. Ask the child sitting in the chair with the

sad face to name one way that people might make creation sad (such as littering, polluting a river, cutting down too many trees, catching too many fish). Ask the child sitting in the chair with the happy face to offer an idea of how to live in God's ways (such as recycling, saving water, taking care of animals). Repeat the game several times.

September 27 – Water carry

Remind the children that in some places of the world people don't have water in their homes and need to carry water from a nearby well, or from a river or lake that is sometimes far away. Often it is the job of the children to carry the water. Invite the group to see what it might feel like to carry water. Place a large empty container at one end of the room (or outside area) and another container full of water

at the opposite end. Give each child a small bucket. The object of the game is to carry their buckets to the opposite end, fill it with water from the large container, and carry the water back without spilling it to empty into the first container. Continue until all the water has been transferred from one container to the other. Discuss the experience together.

Apocalyptic Writing

Apoca what? It's easy! Sound it out like this: a-POK-a-lip-tik. The word "apocalypse" comes from the same root word.



Hey, fellow disciples, apocalyptic writing is a special style of writing that can be found in the Bible and other Near Eastern writings from the centuries before and just after the birth of Jesus.

Interesting!

Strange!

Weird!

Amazing! Odd!

Fantastical!

Wild! Wow!

These are some of the ways apocalyptic writing has been described. So what exactly is it?

- The word "apocalyptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "revealing" or "unveiling."
- Apocalyptic writing uses symbols and visions to describe how people received a special understanding from what they believed to be heavenly beings. Often the meanings of these visions are hard to understand.
- In the Bible these visions explain hidden truths about God. Sometimes they speak about the future of God's people and what will happen at the end of history.
- Apocalyptic writing uses symbols and intense images to describe things that cannot be explained any other way. They are not meant to be descriptions of the way these things actually are.
- In the book of Revelation the author named John travels, in a vision, to "heaven" and is shown the secrets of God's realm in heaven.
- Apocalyptic writing can be found in the books of Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel; the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; the letter to the Thessalonians; and Revelation.