

# Abundant Love

Sometimes, we fall prey to the tendency to see God's activity in predictable places. We expect God's activity in the past. We expect God's activity in moments of healing. We even expect God's activity when God's people go out into the world in helping, human service ministries. We forget that scripture shows us, again and again, that God acts in unexpected ways. Today's scriptures remind us to stay open to the new places and new ways that God's work is revealed. We must take notice of God's surprising activity in the world.

## Focus scripture: John 2:1–11

In this miracle story unique to John's gospel, Jesus' ministry gains public awareness at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The disciples are there, as is Jesus' mother, Mary, who seems to already know and trust in the works of Jesus. (Note, however, that the gospel of John does not refer to Jesus' mother by name.)

The story itself begins simply enough and there is no hint in the first few verses that a miracle is about to occur. Suddenly, "the wine gave out," an embarrassing predicament for the hosts. Mary calls on Jesus to help.

Scholars disagree over Jesus' use of the term woman in his reply to Mary. Some cite it as a term of respect, while others claim it would have been unusual for a son to refer to his mother in this way in that culture. Our ears may hear detachment in the exchange. In spite of that, Mary emerges as a strong character of faith. She trusts Jesus' ability to respond to this need. Mary leads others to exercise such trust when she tells the servants, "do whatever he tells you." The fact that the Greek word for "servants," diakonos, was used by the early church for "minister," may be a subtle clue by the gospel writer about Mary's significance. Some scholars, ancient and modern, saw Mary as having an important role in the early church. This story emerges as a strong witness to Mary's faith and trust.

What is truly amazing in this story is the abundance of wine Jesus offers the wedding party. Imagine about 568 litres or 150 gallons of wine, and of the highest quality! Jesus provides the best wine at the end of the feast. This would have been unheard of in that time – a reversal of expectations. The steward is confused about the origin of the wine, though the servants who had drawn the water know.

Through the turning of the water into wine, Jesus is revealed. This miracle speaks of God bringing extravagance and abundance into everyday activities. God's glory is revealed and the disciples believe in Jesus. The world – or at least the world of this wedding party – has been turned around.

**Isaiah 62:1–5** Using the image of the wedding feast, Isaiah reveals the abundant joy and love that God has for God's people. The prophet is speaking a word of comfort to a hurting and desolate people returning home after exile in Babylon. In Hebrew culture, a name offered clues to one's identity. In receiving a new name from God, the people understand that their relationship with God is restored.

**Psalms 36:5–10** calls us to thankfulness for God's rich abundance in all times and places. God's unconditional love renews and restores us, even in our lowest moments.

**1 Corinthians 12:1–11** attests to the abundance of the Spirit's gifts. Those gifts are poured out upon all for the sake of the common good.

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As God's people, we live with an abundant spirit that stands in contrast to many of the world's realities. We imagine hope where there seems to be none, for we are guided by faith in God's unending love. The Season after the Epiphany is a good time to reflect upon the ways that God's abundant love and Spirit are at work among us. In what ways does Jesus' life and ministry reveal God's abundance to you? In what ways does God continue to bring abundance into the world today?



### Focus scripture

**John 2:1–11**

### Additional scriptures

**Isaiah 62:1–5**

**Psalms 36:5–10**

**1 Corinthians 12:1–11**

**God of the river bank and the banquet hall, help us hear you and see you when you create, work, and teach, and heal in new places. We expect you in the hospital room but can forget that you also meet us at the wedding feast. Ready our hearts to welcome you and your work among us. Amen.**

### Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on the link.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

Children of all ages get excited at the prospect of a party. Invitations let children know they are welcome and that this particular group wants them to share in a celebration. Parties offer children an opportunity to both receive and practice hospitality. As hosts or guests, young children are developing social skills as they welcome others to their homes or are welcomed into another's home. Becoming more accomplished in social settings builds the self-esteem of children. Children learn these skills from the significant adults, older children, and youth in their lives.

In today's story of a wedding at Cana, Jesus models for children what it means to

provide for the comfort of those gathered for a celebration. Some children in your group may have helped their families prepare for company and have experienced taking instructions from parents on how to do this, as Jesus followed Mary's instructions. Be prepared to explain that wine was a common drink in biblical times, when water was often scarce.

This age group often imagines God to be like a loving parent who nurtures, cares, and provides for them. This week's story helps to reinforce God as one who offers generous love that never runs out. Pray that the children will feel God's extravagant love, more than enough to share.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Psalm 36:5–10, John 2:1–11, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 59).
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 8) and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 8), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).
- ❑ Set up a worship space with green cloth, white Christ candle, Bible with a bookmark placed in focus passage, matches, and offering basket.

### Gather

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song, "I Am a Child of God" (p. 19 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).
- ❑ Bring a party invitation card.

### Engage

- ❑ Bring copies of the resource sheet "[Map of Palestine](#)" (p. 118); save copies for next week.
- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[A Party](#)."
- ❑ **Art group:** no supplies required
- ❑ **Party group:** Bring juice, small glasses, cupcakes, icing/frosting, decorations.

### Respond

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

- ❑ **Community zone:** length of mural paper, art supplies
- ❑ **Art zone:** copies of diamond templates on resource sheet "[Light Catchers](#)," poster board, dowels, fishing line, circles cut from reflective materials
- ❑ **Music zone:** wooden paint stirring sticks, jingle bells, ribbon, recording of lively music
- ❑ **Drama zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Invited to Show Love](#)"; follow instructions for preparing envelopes.
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** information about overseas church workers or list of church members confined to home or hospital, card stock, construction paper, art and craft supplies, copies of resource sheet "[Greeting Cards](#)" (p. 119)

### Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "You Are Holy/*Hamba Nathi*" (p. 42 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).



# Abundant Love

Scripture  
John 2:1–11

**FOCUS** To celebrate God's generous love through a story of Jesus at a wedding

## Gather

**Welcome** the children as they arrive, inviting them to share some news from the past week.

### Opening ritual

**Call to gather** Invite the children to gather around the worship space and ask a child to light the Christ candle.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song "I Am a Child of God" (p. 19 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).

**Pray** Invite children to join in the litany based on **Psalm 36:5–10** by speaking the bolded responses.

O God, your faithfulness  
is as wide as the sky. **Thank you, God.**  
Your justice is like a mighty mountain.  
**Thank you, God.**

Your steadfast love is like a fountain,  
like a river, ever-flowing. **Thank you, God.**  
**Amen.**

Receive the offering and extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

### Connecting with the focus

Show the party invitation and invite children to tell you about invitations they've received and the kinds of parties they've been to. Have them think of a time when their families have had guests coming to their house for a party or a visit.

- **What kinds of things did your family do to get ready for the guests?**
- **How did you help with the party?**

## 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 gospel of John. Explain that the one who wrote this gospel is not the same person as John the Baptizer. This week's story is about a time when Jesus was invited to a wedding party in Cana. Distribute copies of the "[Map of Palestine](#)" (p. 118) and invite children to find Cana. In Bible times, the families of the bride and groom were expected to provide for the guests during the wedding celebration, which might last for several days. They had to make sure there was enough food and drink for everyone.

### The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[A Party](#)" to tell this week's story based on **John 2:1–11**. Ask:

- **What surprising thing did Jesus do in this story?**

Jesus could have changed just one jar of water into wine, which might have been enough since the jars were so large.

- **What did Jesus do instead?**

Read aloud **John 2:11** and explain that "signs" play an important role in the way the story of Jesus is told in the gospel of John. These signs tell us something special about Jesus, as the one God said would come to help the Jewish people.

- **Why do you think this amazing thing that Jesus did was called a "sign"?**

### 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.)*

**Art group** The children in this group will explore the story through their imaginations. Remind of the large jugs of wine filled to overflowing. Explain that God's overflowing love for us is like that – it goes on and on and on and never stops. Invite children to demonstrate with hand and body movements the image of overflowing abundance.

**Party group** The children in this group will practice hospitality and prepare snack food for the group. Have them wash their hands, decorate the cupcakes using the supplies provided, and set a

table with the cupcakes and juice.

**Reporting** Invite the art group to show movements that imitate overflowing wine and love, and invite the party group to host the rest of the group for a celebration snack.

### The Bible story and us

The story of the wedding at Cana has been used to illustrate God's love for God's people.

#### ■ What does this amazing event say to you about God's love?

When we share God's generous love with others, we are practicing hospitality. Invite the children to name some ways they can provide care and hospitality for others at home, school, church, or with their friends.

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## Respond

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

❑ **Community zone: Group mural** God's love, like the wine at the wedding feast, is abundant and transformative. Provide art supplies. Invite the group to collaborate on creating a mural that symbolizes the abundance of God's love. Display this art for the congregation to enjoy.



❑ **Art zone: Mobiles** When children experience the abundant love of God they can be generous in sharing that with others. Invite them to make mobiles as reminders of God's generous and transformative love. Distribute supplies and follow the directions on the resource sheet "[Light Catchers](#)." Have them make individual mobiles to take home or work together on a large one to hang in the church as a symbol of God's abundant love.

❑ **Music zone: Bell sticks** *(for younger children)* We can celebrate God's abundant love with music. Give each child a wooden paint stir stick to decorate with markers. Encourage them to cover both sides of the stick with bright geometric patterns. Then have them tie some jingle bells to the ends of lengths of ribbon and staple the other ends of the ribbons to the ends of the stir

sticks. (Use three or more ribbons per stick.) Play a recording of lively music and invite the group to join in joyful celebration.

❑ **Drama zone: Role play** *(for younger children)* Jesus showed generous love in practicing hospitality, and we can participate in God's generous love, too. Divide into small groups, and give each group an envelope with a scenario from the resource sheet "[Invited to Show Love](#)" inside. Assist the children as needed to read the scenarios and invite them to act out the scenarios and ways they might show God's generous love in these situations.

❑ **Outreach zone: Cards** The church shows God's abundant and transforming love when it cares for people. Invite children to make cards to give to those working overseas on behalf of the church and/or to those in their own church community who are sick or house-bound. Distribute supplies and copies of the resource sheet "[Greeting Cards](#)" (p. 119) and invite children to choose a type of card and create images that could symbolize generous love. Encourage children to include a short note saying who they are and a personal wish or prayer.

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## Bless

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**Gather** around the worship area and relight the Christ candle. Invite children to name some generous acts of love that they might offer during this coming week.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song "You Are Holy/*Hamba Nathi*" (p. 42 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).

**Pray** Holy God,  
thank you for your generous love.  
Help us to always be ready  
to share that love with others. Amen.

**Blessing** Send children out with the following blessing:  
"Go out to share God's abundant love with others this week."

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## Reflect

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How were the children able to connect the story of the wedding feast with God's abundant and transforming love?  
How did they help you experience God's abundant love during this session?



# A Party

based on John 2:1-11

Use pauses to create  
drama in this story.

**A**fter the baptism, Jesus returned to Galilee, the land where he had grown up. A big wedding party was going on in Cana, a town in Galilee. Jesus' mother Mary was at the party. Jesus and the disciples who were journeying with him were invited to the party too.

Wedding parties in Jesus' day could go on for more than a day, maybe even a week. So when the drinks for the party ran out before the guests were ready to go home, it was a serious matter.

"Jesus," said Mary, "they have nothing left for the guests to drink."

"What does that matter to me, Mother? We are not giving this party," said Jesus.

To some servants standing nearby, Mary said, "Do whatever Jesus tells you to do."

And off she went to visit with her friends.

Jesus looked around. Along the wall stood six large stone water jugs. Each one held 20 or 30 gallons (80 to 120 litres).

Jesus turned to the servants. "Fill those jugs with water."

The servants shook their heads, wondering what good that would do. But Mary had said to do whatever Jesus told them.

It took a while to fill such huge jugs, but they filled them to the very top. Jesus said to the servant in charge, "Dip some out and take it to the person in charge of the food and drink."

The servant did. As soon as that person tasted the water, he hurried to the bridegroom. "Everyone serves the best drinks first, but you have saved the best until last."

Jesus had changed the water into the best drinks at the wedding party. When the disciples saw what had happened, they believed that Jesus was someone special sent from God.

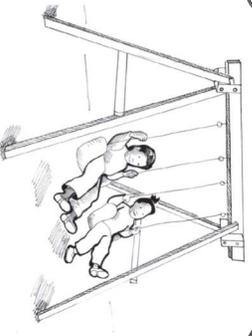


# INVITED TO SHOW LOVE

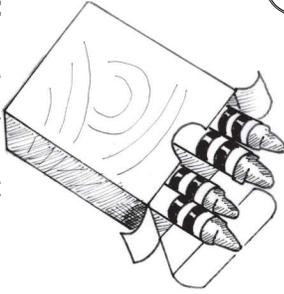
You are invited to show God's generous love, too.

**Instructions:**

Cut apart these scenarios and place each one inside an envelope. On the outside of each envelope, write the words "You Are Invited." Divide into pairs or small groups and give each small group an envelope. Assist the children as needed to read the scenarios. Encourage them to work together to act out responses to the following scenarios.



You and friends are on the swings at recess and others want a turn. Act out what you might do to show God's generous love.



Your class is working on an art project and there is only one box of crayons. Act out what you might do to show God's generous love.



A sister or brother took one of your toys without asking. Act out what you might do to show God's generous love.



A friend is being bullied at school. Act out what you might do to show God's generous love.



A new child comes to your class at school. Act out what you might do to show God's generous love.



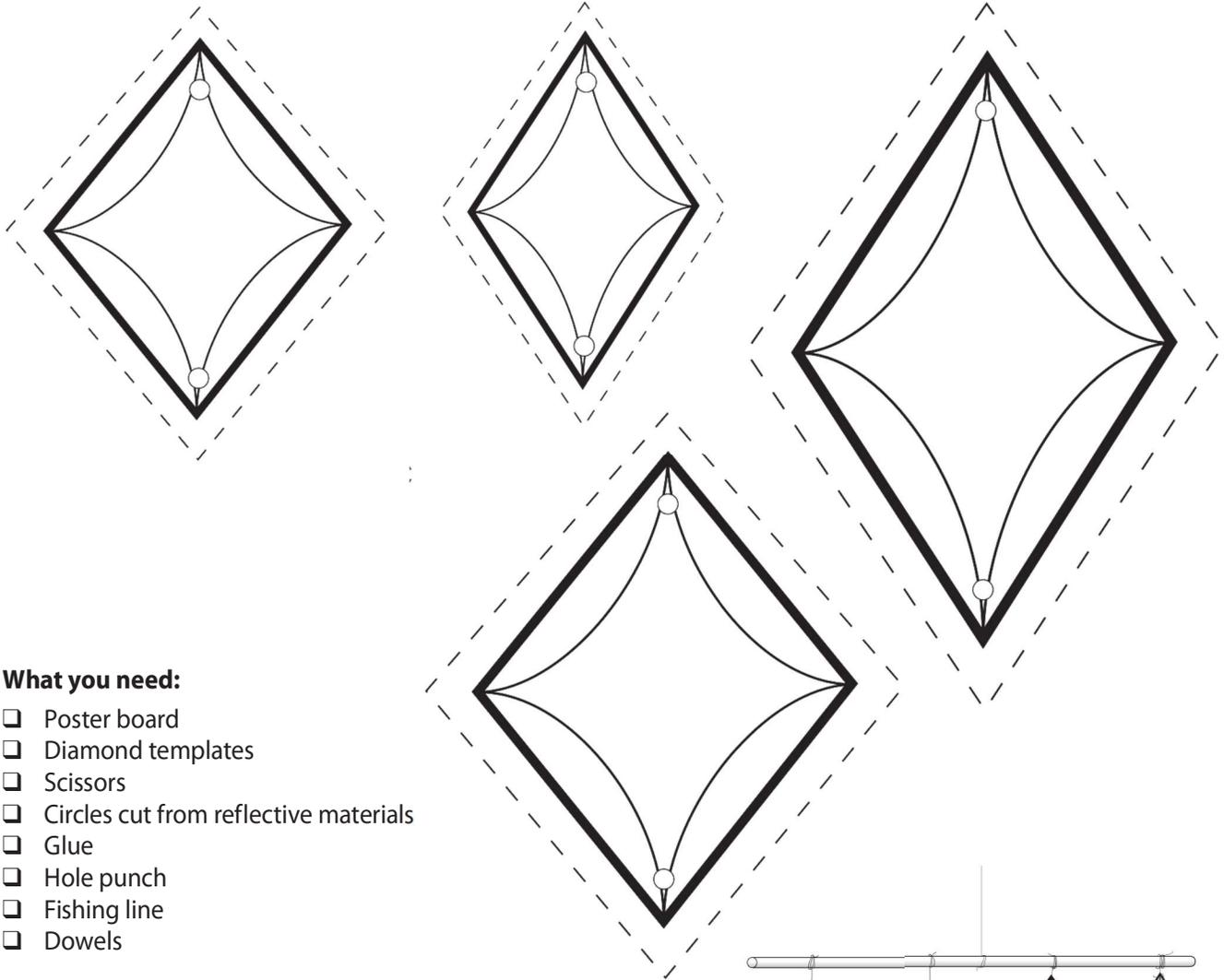
A friend takes a chocolate bar from the grocery store without paying. Act out what you might do to show God's generous love.



A classmate is having trouble with a homework assignment. Act out what you might do to show God's generous love.



# Light Catchers



### What you need:

- Poster board
- Diamond templates
- Scissors
- Circles cut from reflective materials
- Glue
- Hole punch
- Fishing line
- Dowels

### What you do:

- 1 Provide diamond templates that are larger than the circles cut from reflective materials. Cut the poster board into diamond shapes, using the templates.
- 2 Glue the reflective circles on the front and back of the poster board diamonds and decorate around these, if desired.
- 3 Punch holes at the top of the poster board diamonds.
- 4 String fishing line through the each hole and fasten it securely.
- 5 Tie the diamonds to a dowel, hanging them at differing lengths.
- 6 Add a fishing line hanger to the dowel. Hang the mobile where it will reflect sunlight, artificial light, or candlelight.

