



Faces of Easter Enrichment

A Toolkit Examining our Godly Play Practice for Implicit Bias

The Material

Background

The Godly Play Foundation began big wondering work in the summer of 2020. The George Floyd Moment forced the Foundation, and many of us, to recognize (some for the first time) racism as a manifestation of ecclesial and societal sin. This moment invited the Foundation to discern how to respond faithfully to nurture and affirm the Imago Dei in all people, including and especially the Black and Brown people so often missing from our circles. One of the first things we did was commission new art for one of our beloved stories, the Faces of Easter. This story, told during the Lenten season, now features a Black Holy Family. Some may question its “historical accuracy” or bristle at changing the traditional status quo, but doing so misses an opportunity to wonder about God’s Image and those who bear it. This change makes a profound theological statement, challenging notions of white supremacy long-held (and perpetuated) by the Church.

When the new artwork was unveiled, many asked if we planned to do multiple versions of this story featuring other ethnicities. Some asked, “What if my mostly white church would prefer the original version? Can we still get it?” Or, “What if my church is mostly Asian and would like a version that reflects our ethnicity?”

Upon some reflection, we have decided not to offer multiple versions. Instead, we recommend you create an enrichment material to this lesson that features images of Jesus from many different cultures.



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First Steps

Does your Godly Play environment reflect the beauty and diversity of God's creation?

Before introducing this enrichment material, we encourage you to work to build an environment where children are immersed in the diversity and beauty of creation from all perspectives - body types, skin color, ways of moving and seeing (wheelchairs, glasses, etc.), hair types and styles, clothing choices, ages, sizes, and more. You can do that in various ways by looking at the art on the walls, the books on the shelves, the types of response materials you offer, and the story materials.

Tools and ideas to help as you explore how to build that diverse and beautiful environment:

- [Art in Christian Tradition database](#): Designed for scholars, students, pastors, and religious educators, all of the images may be used for non-commercial purposes, with attribution. There are currently 7154 images in the collection.
- Consider networking with local Godly Play practitioners or join the discussion on the Knowing Godly Play in a New Way Facebook group to share resources and ideas.
- Deepen your shelves with picture books that feature diversity such as:
 - *Nana Akua Goes to School* by Tricia Elam Walker
 - *First Light, First Life* by Paul Fleischman
 - *Rain Before Rainbows* by Smriti Prasad-Halls
 - *Many Shapes of Clay* by Kenesha Sneed
 - *The Good for Nothing Tree* by Amy-Jill Levine & Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
 - *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson
 - *A Church for All* by Gayle E. Pitman



The Material

This extension material consists of the following items:

- A tray or basket for the images
- A large variety of images of Jesus (including those that come from various cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, and denominational traditions).

Where will you get these images?

St. Clare's at the Cathedral, a worshipping community located in Coventry, England, offers a wonderful resource called "Face to Face with Jesus." It contains 40 postcards portraying images of Jesus Christ from through the ages and around the world. The postcards come in a box and with a booklet giving the artist and/or source of each image. You can purchase the set from Godly Play Resources [here](#).

If you live outside of the United States, you may want to purchase [directly from St. Clare's](#) at the Cathedral. Here is a link to purchase:

You can also build your collection by finding Christian religious art from various cultures. Many of these images are subject to copyright laws and, therefore, cannot be sold or distributed by Godly Play Resources. Here is one "open source" website we recommend.

[Art in the Christian Tradition by Vanderbilt](#) or <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search?showOnly=openAccess&searchField=All&sortBy=relevance>

How will you use this material?

If children ask about the Faces of Easter (Why does Jesus look like that?) you might say,

Jesus was born to a Jewish family in the part of the world we call the Middle East. So we know he probably had brown skin. But there were no cameras around when he was born and lived on earth. No one painted a picture of him or drew one that we know of. But



over time, people began to paint pictures of what they thought he might have looked like. And they are still painting and drawing pictures of him today. Here are some.

You could then bring the tray with the images of Jesus to the circle and spread them out. After looking at all of them, you could wonder about them, saying:

- *I wonder which one feels like it is just for you today or is about you?*
- *I wonder if we could leave any of these out and still have what we need?*
- *I wonder why people paint(ed) Jesus in so many different ways?*
- *I wonder if there are any other ways people could paint Jesus that aren't included here?*
- *I wonder how you would paint Jesus?*

You will note we are not recommending some of the traditional Godly Play wondering such as asking the children which one they like the best or which one they think is most important. White images of Jesus are so prevalent throughout Christendom that children of all cultures often assume that the white Jesus is the “right one.” If that is the one that is consistently chosen as the most important in our circles, this is hurtful to children. Research has shown that these types of questions can have unintended consequences, including reinforcing prejudice or bias.

Additional ideas

You might also bring this material to a retreat day (either with adults only, or an inter-generational event). You could create a prayer or “wonder station” in one part of the room where you gather, spreading out the images on a large rug or piece of felt. Print the wondering questions on a piece of paper and place it near the circle. People could gather in small groups to wonder about the images or do so individually. You could include materials (colored pencils, watercolors, paper, etc.) that participants could use to paint their own image of Jesus.



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