

Stage 1 (c 4-5)

CATECHISM

Aim 1: Knowledge of basic prayers and major feasts

At this age, prayers such as the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be, Grace and the Guardian Angel prayer are best learned simply by praying them in home and church. Feast days are similarly best explained by celebrating them as fully as possibly - live the liturgical year with all its feasts and fasts and you will teach your child more than any book will at this age!

If you want some ideas for how to celebrate, have a look at some of the popular Catholic blogs such as [Sanctus Simplicius](#), [Around the Year with the Trapps](#), [Catholic Icing](#) and lots lots more.

Aim 2: To be familiar with well known and patron saints

Read together! If your child likes to colour, print off some pictures; if you'd like to encourage good habits of listening then retaining and articulating what has been heard, use the method of oral narration: read the story once through, making sure your child is paying attention, then have him tell back to you what he remembers. If you like, write down his version and let him illustrate it (or stick in a coloured picture). This way, he can make his own 'saints book' to keep and take to Mass.

'[Once Upon a Time Saints](#)' (and the sequel) by Ethel Pochocki are very popular for this age group. These are very American in style but written in a very engaging way and make the saints come alive for young children. For very young children, a focus on dates and historical settings is not as important as simply drawing out some significant moment from the saint's life which the child will remember, dwell upon and love. One wonderful set of books is 'The Story Library of the Saints' by Joan Windham, published in the 1970's. This is out of print but worth looking for. [Cenacle books](#) have a nice selection of books on saints.

Aim 3: To be familiar with well known bible stories

As with the lives of the Saints, read together, illustrate and perhaps do some oral narration. I tend to focus on Old Testament stories in the autumn term in the run up to Christmas. This links in nicely with the Jesse Tree craft and the whole idea of the Old Testament leading up to the coming of the Messiah. For more details on the Jesse Tree idea see age 5-6 Catechism. (There's no reason why you can't do a Jesse Tree every year, at whatever age - we do!)

Then, in winter/spring, in the run up to Easter, the focus shifts neatly to the New Testament and the gospel stories about Our Lord.

[The Golden Children's Bible](#) is very popular, as is Fr Lovasik's [New Catholic Picture Bible](#). These both have well-written quite old fashioned text and realistic rather than cartoon-type illustrations, which personally I think are better. However, my children have also enjoyed this book (not Catholic), which has a more modern feel to it: ['The Story of Jesus'](#).

Aim 4: To grasp the basic outline of what happens at Mass

(NB all references on this site to the Mass, and to books about the Mass, refer to the traditional rite of the Mass, not the new rite of the Mass).

Obviously, the only way to really teach your child about the Mass is to take him/her to it as often as possible. Since we assist at the old Latin form of the Mass, we have no children's liturgy so our children get the full benefit of being present through the whole Mass from day one. Given that your

actual teaching moments are rather limited during the Mass itself, a little background preparation is helpful. At this age, focus on the central action of the Mass, the fact that Jesus becomes really and truly present in a very special way. Encourage your child to observe the behaviour of the adults around him as they are all silent, focussed intently on what is happening.

If he's keen, encourage him to look at a simple missal, such as this [Marian Children's Missal](#), or the lovely little book, '[Jesus Make me Worthy](#)'. The words may mean nothing to him at this stage but he will love the pictures. Take along whatever saints and bible book you have been reading to him so that you can link home and church. Mass can be long and it can be very difficult to keep a small child happy and focussed. If he complains, try to talk to him a little about it, but suggest too that he 'complains' to Jesus - for a little one, this is a very valid basis for a conversation with the One he has come to Mass to meet!